

our trading post from Omaha Neb
Col. Ingraham's Splendid Wild-Southwest Romance!

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January 19, 1892.

No. 756.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

Vol. XXX.



OR,
The Renegades' Captive.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.
A BOY HERO.

"HERE'S a letter from Omaha, now, and we will hear all about Charlie, for it is from my brother."

The speaker was a genial-faced man of middle age, and he was seated in a pleasant sitting-room of his own comfortable house in the State of Kentucky.

It was away back among the "Fifties," before the Civil War that shook our land from one end to the other, and when the "Far West" was beyond the now great city of Chicago.

THE DESPERADO THREW HIS LASSO; THE NOOSE SETTLED OVER THE HEAD OF DASHING CHARLIE.

It was a family party gathered there in the sitting-room, to see what the mail had brought of news for them, and much anxiety had been felt of late in that same circle to receive letters from the Wild West, as two dear to them were exposed to the dangers of borderland.

One of them was a skilled frontiersman, Captain Emmett, a fur-trader and pioneer into the unknown wilderness of the border.

He had lately visited his kinsfolk in their old home, and soon after his departure the young hopeful of the family, Charlie Emmett, just in his teens, had disappeared.

It is true that he had considered himself wrongly punished by the teacher of the country school, for where he had offered himself as a sacrifice, to be whipped instead of a crippled comrade, both had been punished, and Charlie had "gotten even," by a joke upon the master soon afterward.

To escape further punishment he had run away from home, and all search for him had proven unavailing, and the greatest anxiety was felt regarding him until a letter came from St. Louis stating that he had struck out for himself in life, and was following upon his uncle's trail toward the Wild West.

Weeks went by, and then came this letter from the uncle.

It was dated upon the march into the wilds west of the Missouri, and had been sent back by a trapper they had met on their way, to be mailed in Omaha.

The letter was as follows:

"Of course Charlie's letter from St. Louis, told you of his reasons for leaving home; but let me tell you that I have drawn from him his whole story, and I wish to say right here the boy is a hero, a wonder for his years.

"That you would track him to Louisville he knew, so he went to St. Louis instead, riding by night, sleeping by day, to avoid meeting any one.

"Arriving in St. Louis he found I had left, so he sold the fine horse I had given him, bought a complete prairie outfit, paid his way on the steamboat and started for Omaha.

"I had left with my wagon-train before his arrival; but this did not daunt him in the least, for he hired a guide to follow my trail, bought a splendid pony, and started on to overtake me.

"The guide was a traitor, and let a pard into his intention of robbing the boy, believing he had a large amount of money.

"His pard was to follow on their trail, and at night they were to kill Charlie.

"That was their game, and yet, boy though he was, he outwitted them, killed one of the men, wounded the other, made him a prisoner and came on alone on the trail of my wagon-train.

"They were chased by Indians, but Charlie would not set his prisoner free, and halting at a river to fire upon the pursuing red-skins, was deserted by the man, who rode on with the horses after the train.

"Of course he supposed Charlie would be taken and killed.

"But the brave boy hid, the red-skins went on after the trail of the horses, and as the prisoner came into our camp and told the crooked story, I set out with a party of my men on the track track.

"We defeated the Indians after a hot fight, and found Charlie at bay on a hilltop, fighting for his life.

"It is needless to say that I was proud of the boy, and the men named him 'Dashing Charlie,' and 'The Boy Scalper,' names that will cling to him to his dying day, for he had not only killed his man, but his red-skins, too.

"Upon our return to camp we tried Limber Joe, the traitor guide, and of course border justice was visited upon him with promptness and dispatch.

"We have welcomed Charlie as one of us, and he goes with me into the wilderness, exposed of course to greatest dangers, yet hopeful that all will come well in the end.

"I know not when I can write again; but do not fret about us, for Charlie can take care of himself, and I can do as much for myself."

Such was the letter from borderland, and it told of a boy then far away from home exposed to dangers that were enough to make the stoutest heart quail.

CHAPTER II.

THE KIDNAPPERS.

Two men were encamped in the outskirts of Omaha, at a time when that now handsome and prosperous city was a mere frontier post, made up of the army, settlers, traders, Indians and the worst characters to be found upon the border, from the Canada line to Mexico.

The men procured an old army tent, a few cooking utensils, blankets and a few other things readily movable.

Two horses were staked out near, and good animals they were, while their saddles and bridles hung on trees growing upon the banks of a small stream where the men had pitched their tent.

The appearance of the individuals in question

was not indicative of honesty and goodness of purpose.

They were rough-looking, unkempt fellows, types of the worse class of bordermen, apparently ready for any deviltry that might bring gold to their hands.

They had finished their supper, and having lighted their pipes were seated in silence, apparently busy with their meditations.

"See here, Bricktop," said one, suddenly breaking the silence, and addressing his companion by the name which his fiery red hair had gotten for him:

"We has been pards a long time, and we knows pretty well what we is, and is not, and works for one another's interest, don't we?"

"We does, Buck Baldwin, we does."

"Well, now I tells you I wants you to go in with me in this little game."

"It's a boy, Buck, or I'd say yes at once."

"It's a boy, yes, and the nephew o' Cap'n Emmett, whom we both has come to hate, as you know."

"Yes, he hain't a man I loves."

"Well, he has gone off on this fur-trading trip, and the boy, as you heard him say, was to follow and overtake him."

"Yes."

"Limber Joe goes as his guide, and you know what he is."

"I do."

"And if Barney don't go with 'em he'll follow, mark my words, for Limber Joe and him never parts far or long."

"That's so."

"My idea is that Limber Joe knows that the boy carries lots o' money, and he'll just snake it in."

"Killing the boy."

"Maybe, and maybe not; but he and Barney will get the gold and the boy's outfit, mark my words."

"Now we can follow on their trail, and they won't suspect nothing, so we can just rope them in and save the boy."

"Save him?"

"Yes; we kin kidnap him, take him up to the Sioux village, and then go on after the train of Cap'n Emmett and tell him how Limber Joe turned traitor guide to his nephew, and we rescued him from them and carried him to the Sioux village, where he will be safe until his return."

"He knows you and me is about the only white men the Sioux is friendly with and won't kill at sight, and so the boy will be safe with us among them, and when he comes back with his train we can meet him on their trail and give him up to him."

"I see, Buck, but he'll ask why we didn't bring the boy right on with us after his train."

"We'll tell him the Sioux would not let us do that, and want pay for the boy, you see."

"Then when they comes back with the train we'll be on hand with a band of Sioux and ambush 'em, wiping all out and getting the fortune of furs they will have along."

"Does yer see my game, pard?"

"I does; but s'pose thet Limber Joe hev kilt ther boy?"

"We'll jist git his outfit and theirs for ourselves, for we'll wipe Joe and Barney out, and then we can go on after the train and tell ther same tale, for the boy wouldn't be alive to carry out our little game, though if he is, after we have gotten the fur train, we can let ther folks at home know about this boy and get a reward for rescuing him."

"Now is you in this game with me, Bricktop?"

"I is, Pard Buck."

"Well, Limber Joe and the boy started this morning to overtake the train, and Barney left about noon."

"You knows this?"

"I does; for I has had my eyes wide open."

"Then we starts at dawn, Buck, and plays yer game out to ther finish," said Bricktop, earnestly, for he had been won over by the hope of gain which the plot of Buck Baldwin had inspired.

And so the two precious villains, plotting to kill for gold and to kidnap Charlie Emmett, the boy hero who had come from away down in Kentucky, and was following on the trail of his uncle into the wilds of the border, set to work to arrange for an early start upon the track of their victim.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE TRAIL REVEALED.

"PARD, I read it all," said Buck Baldwin, the second evening following the start upon the trail of Charlie Emmett and his guide.

"Yer reads it thet thar has been somebody kilt right here?"

"Yas, fer thet grave says so."

"Graves talk," was the laconic response, and the two stood gazing down upon a new-made mound that could not be mistaken as other than the last resting-place of a human being.

They had turned off the broad trail left by the wagons of the fur-traders, and were standing in what had been the first camp of Charlie Emmett and his guide.

"Well, what does yer read, Buck?" asked Bricktop.

"I reads that ther boy is in thet grave, and that Limber Joe and Barney hev'ing kilt him, has dusted fer other parts."

"It do seem so."

"Sure, and we will follow their trail the first thing come morning?"

"That's our go."

"And we'll rope 'em in and git all they got from ther boy and has themselves."

"Yes."

"And that means three horses, weapons for three and et ceteras and so forth, not to speak of the dust."

"You is right."

"And then?"

"We kin leave our belongings somewhar, corral our horses and go on arter ther train ter say what we intends ter about ther boy."

"Yes; but, pard?"

"Well?"

"Let us just see who be in thet grave,"

"Why does yer want ter distarb a grave?"

"I want to know who occupies it, that is all."

"I never distarbs a grave, though I does make 'em."

"I'll see who it covers," was the remark of Bricktop, and he set to work to throw out the earth from the grave.

It was a tedious task, but at last it was accomplished; wood was thrown upon the fire and by the brightening blaze the form resting in the last long sleep of death was reached.

"Pard Bricktop, it are Barney," cried Buck Baldwin.

"Sure."

"And he was shot."

"There is the wound that kilt him."

"What does it mean?"

"It means that Limber Joe wanted all for himself and so kilt his pard."

"Maybe the boy kilt him."

"And if so?"

"We must find out what followed, for we is on this trail to win."

The grave was filled in again, supper was gotten and disposed of, the fire went down and the two men went to sleep.

At daybreak they were up and the trail of those whom they were tracking was at once taken up.

They were excellent trailers and tracked their intended victim from the camp to the trail, then to another camp.

"Here was where Barney camped, and alone."

"I told you he was a-trackin' Limber Joe to be on hand when wanted," said Baldwin.

"Well, he were there, and will stay there."

"Sure; but now the trail leads on after the wagon train, you sees."

"So it does."

"And along they went at a rapid pace until they came to where a large trail led into the one they were following."

"Indians."

"Sure, Bricktop."

"And Limber Joe and the boy were a-bustling here, as the tracks shows."

"Yes, the three horses were put to it, whoever was a-riding 'em."

So on they went until they came to a deep, swiftly-flowing stream, with high banks on the other shore.

"Bricktop."

"Yes, Buck."

"They halted over on the high hill yonder and held the red-skins off."

"Yes, the signs show it."

"But the reds crossed and the others had to light out."

"We'll soon know it all," was the response and they too crossed the river.

Arriving upon the other shore, and a reconnaissance showing that there was no foe near, they separated and began to "read signs," as it were.

After an hour they met again at the spot where they had staked out their horses.

"Well, Bricktop?"

"There has been a big fight here."

"Yes, atween ther red-skins and Limber Joe."

"More than him."

"Who else?"
 "It looks ter me as if a big party dropped back from the train, for there's many tracks about and some graves over in the river canyon."

"You seen 'em?"
 "Yes, and I says that that train people has had a fight here."

"And Limber Joe and the boy?"
 "I'm all in the dark about them."
 "We will push on and see."
 "I'm with you."

Mounting, they rode on once more to suddenly come upon a group of newly made graves and apart from them a number of others.

"Pard, they had it hot here and no mistake."
 "Them graves holds white folks and them yonder has got Injuns in 'em."

"Well, we goes on."
 "Of course, for we must kidnap that boy, if Limber Joe has had ter take him on to ther train."

"We'll know afore long, and we kin go to ther traders and say we was run in by Injuns who seemed to be on the war-trail even ag'in' us two."

"Then we kin catch the boy some night and light out."

"Oh we don't intend ter be beat out of our game."

And so the two men went once more upon their way, following the trail of the fur-traders' train.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOY HUNTER.

THE letter from Captain Emmett, of the fur-traders' train, written to Kentucky, tells the reader of the arrival of his nephew, Charlie Emmett in the far West, and the dangers and adventures he had passed through to overtake his uncle.

Having done so, against all obstacles, and having brought the traitor guide to justice, by his turning the tables upon him, Dashing Charlie had become a hero even among such men as comprised the train of the fur-traders.

Going as they were into a country where danger awaited them at every turn, and death was a daily occurrence to be looked for in their midst, the fur-traders were picked men.

Captain Emmett had been on such expeditions before, and he was an experienced borderman, so knew just whom to take along.

His outfit was as complete as a Government train on a march, and the same discipline was maintained at all times.

It was a valuable train too, with the money along, and stores with which to purchase furs, and each man knew what his duty was and did not shirk from it, for upon each one depended the safety of all.

Into the midst then of these men of nerve Dashing Charlie had been welcomed as an ally.

Boy as he was, half a score of years younger than any one else in the train, in his adventures to overtake them he had shown himself well worthy the name of hero.

He had faced death fearlessly, and was now eager and anxious to share the dangers and hardships of the long expedition.

Captain Emmett had decided upon the course he was to take, and knew just where he could find a tribe of red-skins who devoted their time to trapping animals of all kinds and were ready and willing to trade the furs for the blankets, weapons, trinkets and other articles brought by the traders.

He had no doubt but that he could load the train with furs, which would bring him a golden harvest once he reached a place where he could sell his goods obtained at such risk and often hardships which only a strong constitution could stand.

He had, in his visits to his old home in Kentucky, explained to his young nephew, Charlie, so much of life upon the plains, that the youth felt that he was pretty well acquainted with the wild life he had chosen to lead, and for which he believed himself so well adapted.

He had at once asked to be assigned to duty with the others, and was given the work of hunting for the train, along with Girard who was the guide, and who had taken a wonderful fancy to the boy.

There was also another who was told to take Dashing Charlie under his care, and that was a Pawnee Indian who acted as scout.

Pawnee Pete, for such was his name, had been the first to discover Charlie, when the party from the train went back in search of him, and finding the boy most friendly inclined, he had met him half-way, and told him he would make a great warrior out of him.

With an uncle such as Captain Emmett was, and such special tutors in plaincraft as were Girard the guide and Pawnee Pete, not to speak of the others of the train, Dashing Charlie felt that he had every opportunity to make a man of himself.

One day, the fourth after his joining the train, Charlie was out some miles ahead with Girard the guide.

"I say, boy pard, you beat around for game a little, while I find the best way to take the train through this timber," said Girard, as he halted at a heavily timbered ridge, which he wished to cross if possible, rather than go around, as it would save a couple of days' march.

Charlie was glad of the chance, for he had seen some deer a short while before, and he rode away to get a shot at them.

In this he was successful, and more, he brought down a couple of fat ones with his repeating rifle.

Hardly had he done so when two horsemen rode in sight.

At first Charlie supposed they were from the wagon-train, and waved his hat to them.

But as they drew near he saw that they were strangers.

In the mean while Girard the guide had found a way of crossing the ridge, by making a bridge across a narrow ravine, and he decided to go back and get a number of men to come on ahead and cut timber, so as not to delay the train very long when it came up.

But Charlie was not at the rendezvous appointed, and the guide gave a long, shrill whistle, which the boy knew well.

But it brought no response, and at once the guide, in some alarm, set out to hunt up the missing boy.

CHAPTER V.

MISSING.

WHEN Girard failed to find Charlie at the rendezvous, instinctively he seemed to dread that some harm had befallen him.

He knew that he had been gone several hours, and that Charlie must have readily gotten a shot at the deer, and should have returned to the place where he had left him.

But the whistle remained unanswered, and though repeated again and again, brought no response.

So Girard at once went off on the boy's trail.

He readily followed it, circling around as Charlie had ridden, to get a shot at the deer, and then came upon the spot where he had dismounted and crept up to a place within range.

His tracks showed that he had returned to his horse, mounted, and ridden over in the little vale where lay his game, and dismounted near the two fallen deer.

But then the guide came to a sudden halt, for he saw two other trails near.

They were made by horses that were shod, too, and so he said:

"He has met some of the men from the train, and gone back with them."

"Yes, they have taken with them the best cuts of meat."

With this he mounted his horse again and headed back for the train at a gallop.

He felt no longer any anxiety about the boy, but was only anxious to get men and push on for the ridge to bridge the ravine.

He came in sight of the train, and meeting Captain Emmett riding ahead, told him that the ridge could be crossed by a couple of hours' work in building a bridge, and thus save several days' march.

"I am glad to know this, Girard, for we will save much time by it, going and coming, as we will doubtless return this way."

"But did not Charlie go with you?"

"Yes, sir, and killed two fat bucks, got his venison, and returned some time since."

"He has not returned to the train."

"Not returned, sir?"

"I have not seen him."

"Why, some of the men met him just where he killed his game, and I supposed they had all come back together."

"Some of the men met him, you say?"

"Yes, sir; two of them."

"Why, Girard, there has not been a man leave the train."

"Can this be possible, sir?"

"It is. See! here they all come," and as the train came up, Captain Emmett called out:

"Who are away from the train, Chalmers?"

"No one, except your boy and Pawnee Pete, as Girard is here."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Captain Emmett ran his eyes hastily over the people of the train, and then said:

"You are right, Dick."

"Pawnee Pete and Charlie are the only ones missing."

"Girard, who were the men you saw?"

"I did not see them, sir; only their trails."

"Ah! and where?"

"A couple of miles from where we now are."

"I will return at once and see where their trails lead; but as their horses were shod, I supposed, of course, they were from the train."

"But where did you leave Charlie?" and Captain Emmett was growing anxious now.

"I left him at the foot of the ridge, sir, for he was to hunt some game, while I looked out for a crossing of the ravine."

"We were to meet at a spot I pointed out on our way, and not finding him there, and hearing no response to my whistle, I went on his trail."

"And found the others with it?"

"Yes, sir, I found the tracks of two horses come up to where Charlie had halted by the deer he had shot, and so supposing they were men from the train, I hastened on to get a party to push on ahead and cut timber for the bridge."

"Well, Girard, I will go with you; and Dick, send half a dozen men to follow us, for I very much fear my poor boy has gotten into some trouble."

"I sincerely hope not, captain," was the response of Doctor Dick Chalmers, who was one of the partners of Captain Emmett, in the expedition.

"I will push on with the train to the ridge and halt there," he continued, as Captain Emmett rode on with the guide.

The two rode rapidly to the spot where the two strange trails were visible, and Girard pointed them out.

As every man was with the train, except Pawnee Pete, who rode an unshod Indian pony, it was sure that Dashing Charlie had met those who could hardly be other than foes, and as the tracks of the three horses led away from the point they should have taken to return to the train, both Captain Emmett and Girard seemed to feel that evil had befallen the brave boy.

CHAPTER VI.

A LOST TRAIL.

CAPTAIN EMMETT'S face wore a gloomy expression, as he turned to Girard the guide, and asked:

"Well, what does this mean?"

Girard also appeared worried.

The youth had gone out with him and he felt, in a measure, responsible for his safety.

"I hardly know what to say, captain, more than that there are other people here than belong to the train," responded Girard.

"Who are they?"

"It's hard to say, sir, for certainly Limber Joe and his pard were all of that lot."

"Yes, and they are dead."

"The horses are shod, sir."

"That causes you to think they were white men?"

"Yes, sir, unless Indians rode American horses."

"I see no reason to believe they were Indians; but can it be that two white men are up here alone?"

"We must find that out, captain."

"By trailing them?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see no signs of a struggle, and the boy is not one to be taken without a fight, did he believe them to be foes?"

"No, sir, but they may have gotten the drop on him by strategy."

"But, captain?"

"Yes, Girard."

"I'll follow the trail, sir, while you wait for the men to come up."

"Then you can send one back to guide the camp to the ridge, where there is a good camping-ground and I'll mark the trail I take well so you can follow it."

"All right, Girard, and lose no time, for though I hope no harm has befallen the boy, still I am anxious to know just whose company he has fallen into."

"As I am, sir," and Girard rode off on the trail of the three horses, going at a quick canter, for he readily followed the tracks which to others would have hardly been visible without close search.

So the captain waited for the coming of his men, whom he had told his partner, Doctor Chalmers, to have follow him.

They soon arrived, and there were five of them, for Dick Chalmers had come himself.

"Well, captain, any signs of the boy?" he called out.

"He met two men here and has gone with them, where I do not know."

"But Girard is following the trail, and I will go on now with the men, Dick, while you take the train on to the ridge and camp."

Doctor Chalmers went on to meet the train, while Captain Emmett rode away after Girard the guide, followed by the four men who had come with his partner.

Girard had marked the trail as he went along, so that there was no trouble in following it.

It led for a short distance in the direction of the train, then there were signs of a halt being made, and the ground was considerably cut up by the hoofs of the horses, as though they had moved about quickly and considerably.

The keen eye of the captain caught sight of some red marks upon the trail, and he said earnestly:

"There has been bloodshed here, men."

He set his lips firmly together, and rode on at a gallop.

Something seemed to tell him that he had seen the spot where a tragedy had occurred.

Had the brave boy been murdered?

That was the question in every mind, if not expressed.

On they went, following the trail rapidly, for Girard had marked it more plainly than ever as they went along.

At last they came to a wide stream, and there on the bank stood Girard, the guide.

It was evident at a glance that he was in a quandary.

"Well, Girard, what have you discovered?" called out Captain Emmett as they rode up.

"You noted one place on the trail, where it turned?"

"Yes."

"Did you see the red stains there?"

"We did, and I was sure that right there it came to a fight between the boy and those with him."

"So I believe, sir, for the signs showed a scuffle."

"But the trail ends here, Captain Emmett."

"It crosses the river, you mean?"

"Well, if it does, I cannot find where it comes out upon the other side."

"I went across and have ridden up and down for a mile, but no landing was made that I could find, and yet right here you see, sir, the trail enters the river."

"Yes, and right here we must camp and find the lost trail if it takes a week," was the firm response of Captain Emmett, and those who knew him well were certain that he was not a man to give up a cause until it was irrevocably lost.

CHAPTER VII. ABANDONED.

HAVING made up his mind to hunt for the lost trail, Captain Emmett sent two of his men back to camp, to tell Doctor Chalmers, who was next in command, and the surgeon of the outfit as well, to camp at the ridge until further orders, and send half a dozen men, with Pawnee Pete and several days' provisions to him.

Then the captain and the others set to work to pick up the lost trail.

One man swam his horse across with the guide, and while one was to go up-stream for a mile or more, the other was to go down along the bank, both searching for the landing of the three horses that must have crossed at that point.

Upon the side where the trail entered the stream, Captain Emmett and the other man went up and down in search of a landing, for fear those they followed might have entered the river as a blind and come out again upon the same shore they had left.

But though the searchers went up and down for several miles not a trace of a trail leaving the water could be found by any one of the four.

At last they all returned to the starting-point and compared notes.

"You saw nothing, Girard?"

"Not a sign, sir."

"Nor did I."

"I saw no trail leaving the river up the stream, sir," said one of the men who had gone up the bank.

"And I didn't find any," the other remarked.

"Well, the trail entered the river right there, and it has a coming-out place; but where?"

"No horse could swim down the current so far, and I hardly know what to think of it," Girard said.

The more they talked it over the more bewildered they became as to what had become of the three horses they had followed to that point.

At length Captain Emmett said:

"Well, Girard, night is coming on, and the men will be here soon."

"When day dawns again we will divide our forces into four parties, and go up and down the stream beyond all distance that a horse could swim, and see if we can not find out where this trail leaves the river, for find it we must, as the more I think of it, the more certain I am that harm has befallen that poor boy."

"I hope not, sir, but it looks bad, I admit."

"Still, he is one who has proven pretty well that he can take care of himself when need be."

"Yes, if he has not been already killed, I shall firmly expect to see him yet coming into camp some night as we go on our way; but here come the men from the train."

It was now sunset, and coming up at a swift canter were the men whom Captain Emmett had sent after.

They looked very much disappointed to learn that no trace of the missing boy had been found, and Captain Emmett seemed to feel more gloomy than before, as he had held a lingering hope that Dashing Charlie had returned to the train.

A camp was at once made upon the river-bank, and Pawnee Pete was put on guard for the first watch, when Girard was to relieve him, for when these two were upon a trail no one else was asked to do duty.

Girard aroused the camp in time to have breakfast, saddle up and get to the starting point by the very first glimmer of dawn, and at a command from the captain the four bands of searchers started.

It was noon when they again met in camp, all having returned except Girard and Pawnee Pete, who had, as the guide expressed it, "played lone hands in the trail hunt."

Not one of the others had found the slightest clew to where the trail had left the river, and all seemed to feel impressed by the fact.

At last Girard returned, but to the eager looks of all, he said:

"I am dead beat, for I could not find the trail, pards."

"You did not see Pawnee Pete?"

"No, captain, he went down on your side of the river, you know."

"Yes, I know; but I did not know but that he might have crossed."

"But what is to be done?"

"Wait for Pawnee Pete to come in, sir."

"You have hope in the Indian, I see, Girard?"

"He is a wonder, sir, as a trailer, and he is as cunning as a fox."

"True, and his long stay gives me hope."

Thus the afternoon passed away, the men again making a search for the missing trail, but with the same result as before.

Just as night came on all met around the camp-fire, all except Pawnee Pete.

But soon after he glided like a specter up to the fire.

"Ah, Pete, what did you discover?"

"No find trail."

"Pete went down river long way, cross stream and go 'way up—then cross and come down."

"No see trail."

"What do you think, then, they did?"

"Kill horse, maybe, and let river carry him down."

"Then go on foot," was the laconic response.

"Captain, I believe that solves the riddle, and Pete is right," cried Girard.

"And if so?"

"We can only give it up, captain, bad as it will seem."

"I will camp here until to-morrow, and try once more."

"Then if we can find no trace of the boy, we will abandon the search," was the sad reply.

And the next day the search again proved fruitless, and his duty to others demanding it, Captain Emmett gave the order to return to the train, which was to once more continue on its way, abandoning Dashing Charlie to his fate.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KIDNAPPERS' RUSE.

WHEN Dashing Charlie killed his game, he quickly ran forward and slashed the throats of the deer, to let them bleed, and was preparing to select the choicest parts to take back to camp, when his eyes fell upon the two horsemen, whom he at first believed were from the train.

But discovering his mistake he very quickly stood on the defensive, for he had come already to regard every man a foe in borderland, until he had proof that he was a friend.

The two men saw his act, and that he sprung to cover quickly, his rifle ready for action, and for a moment it seemed as though they too intended to seek a hiding-place.

But while one half-started for cover, the other called out:

"Hold on, young pard, and don't show fight, for we is no Injuns."

"Indians are not the only foes in this country, I've discovered, pards," was the response of Dashing Charlie.

The men laughed, and one of them returned:

"So you hev found thet out, hev yer?"

"Yes."

"Well, yer is a young one ter be astray in ther woods, leetle pard."

"I am not very far astray," was the cautious reply of the boy.

"I take it you belong to Cap'n Emmett's outfit o' fur men."

"I do."

"Waal, you is the very one we wants, for we is a-lookin' for the train."

"Why are you here, then, and not following on the trail of the train?"

"Waal, you is a sharp one, and no mistake; but I'll answer yer question, pard, by sayin' we was a-hopin' ter head ye off, for bein' on horse-back, we could cut across whar ther train c'u'dn't go."

"That is so; but I think I saw you in Omaha some time ago."

"Right yer is, sonny, and yer has a good eye and better mem'ry, for my face hain't out o' ther common run o' mortals; but now jist show us whar ther train is, quick, for we has a message from ther commandant of ther post at Omaha."

"Ah! I'll take you there," and Dashing Charlie slung his rifle upon his back now, no longer feeling suspicious.

One of the men then dismounted and helped him secure his fresh deer-steaks, and went on, the while, to say:

"Yer see, scouts hev come in ter report thet ther Injuns is jist a-raisin' Old Nick, and ther commandant sent us ter overtake Cap'n Emmett and tell him ter head fer ther river and establish a fort there, and he'd send a comp'ny of sogers ter help him until it were seen what ther Sioux was a-goin' ter do."

"Well, my uncle will be glad to welcome you, I know, and though I promised to meet Girard the guide ahead in the trail some distance from here, I can go there after seeing you to the train," and Dashing Charlie mounted his horse and led the way in the direction which he knew would head the train off.

For awhile he went along, riding in advance of the two men, and without an atom of suspicion now against them.

They were hard-looking fellows it was true, yet no more so than many others he had seen, and their story was a straight one, for what else could have brought them to that part of the country alone?

At length, as he turned toward the left he suddenly saw something flash over his head and a lariat, cast by one of the two horsemen following him, settled quickly around Dashing Charlie, pinning his arms to his side.

The boy struggled, and drove his spurs into the flanks of his horse, hoping to break away.

But a second lariat was quickly thrown and caught over the head of his horse, thus checking his flight.

At the same instant the man who had lariatated Dashing Charlie spurred quickly alongside of his horse and thrusting a revolver in his face said sternly:

"You is our game, boy pard, and if yer don't want ter die yer won't raise a row."

"I means it."

"I deserve this for trusting you," angrily responded Dashing Charlie, whose heart was full at his capture.

The other man now came alongside and at once began to unlock his belt of arms from about his waist, when, quick as a flash Dashing Charlie seized the weapon held in his face and turning it upon the man who had held it, pulled trigger.

The man uttered a startled cry, an oath and a groan of pain, while he reeled in his saddle.

But before Dashing Charlie could fire again the other kidnapper dealt him a blow upon the back of the neck that stunned him, for he fell forward and dropped from his saddle to the ground.

CHAPTER IX.

IN DANGEROUS HANDS.

WHEN Dashing Charlie saw that odds were against him, as he realized that for some reason the two men had made him a prisoner, he was at first very much cast down.

But he soon rallied and decided to watch his chance and act for himself.

That he made a brave beginning the reader has already seen, as he shot one of the men, and would have gotten the drop upon the other had he been a little further off from him, out of reach of his aim.

But Buck Baldwin dealt him a blow that felled him from the saddle, and, with the agility of a cat, sprung upon him.

Half-dazed by the blow, Charlie could offer but very slight resistance, and soon realized that he was bound securely, his hands being tied behind him.

Then Buck Baldwin raised him to his saddle, made the lariat of Charlie's horse fast to his own, and, turning to his wounded comrade, said:

"We has got him dead ter rights, Bricktop, and if you hain't badly hurted, we will be all right."

"Well, I thought he had kilt me at first, but I guess it hain't so bad arter all, though the bullet did tear ther flesh up considerable."

"Jest see what yer kin do to help me, and then we'll be goin' on our way, as they might come ter look fer ther boy from ther train."

Buck Baldwin examined the wound his comrade had received at Charlie's hands, the boy looking quietly on, while Bricktop kept saying:

"Go slow, pard, go slow, for it's a bad one."

The bullet had cut its way, or rather tore its way, through the shoulder, making an ugly wound, but not breaking the bone.

It had passed out, and as the bone was not injured, Bricktop seemed quite jubilant, and said: "Yer meant well, leetle man, but yer didn't quite make ther rifle."

"I wish it had killed you, for you deserve it," was Charlie's prompt response.

"Does I?"

"Yes, you do, for I have never harmed you, and you have no right to capture me as you have."

"Well, we knows our biz, and we has done it."

"We has got you dead ter rights, and you goes with us."

"Where?"

"We has not yet decided whar, but yer goes with us."

"If my uncle and the men don't overtake you."

"That's a reminder we had better light out, so we'll take the hint."

"Come, Buck, we must be a-gittin', for ther boy knows what ter expect, and we does too ef the folks from ther train catches us."

They were now ready for the retreat, and Buck Baldwin led the way, Dashing Charlie's horse in lead and following.

Bringing up the rear was Bricktop, growling with pain from his wound, and threatening Charlie with all sorts of evils.

At length they reached the river and here they halted.

"Say, pard, we'd better throw 'em off here."

"Throw what off, Baldwin?" asked Bricktop.

"Them as will come from the train arter us."

"Yer think they will?"

"Don't yer know Cap'n Emmett hain't ther man not ter hunt for ther boy?"

"Well, how kin we throw 'em off the scent?"

"I'll tell yer, for I guesses I is about the only man as knows ther racket."

"What racket?"

"Does yer see thet sandbar yonder?" and Buck Baldwin pointed to a small willow island growing up the stream.

"Yas."

"Well, in among them willows thar is a raft o' logs that will hold our three horses and ourselves easy."

"Yer don't mean it, pard?"

"I does."

"How did it git thar?"

"Yer see Buffalo Bill were a-guidin' some cavalry through the country, and they got corraled by Sioux about six miles above here."

"They was only ten in number, and thar was a hundred or more Injuns who was a-goin' ter git ther sogers' scalps, they concluded."

"But darned ef Buffalo Bill didn't set ther men ter work with a couple o' axes they hed along and made a couple o' rafts that would hold 'em all, horses ter boot."

"No."

"He did fer a fact, and they jist got onter ther rafts at night and floated down ther river while the Sioux was a-preparin' ter wipe 'em out."

"They landed about here with one of ther rafts, and 't'other ran upon thet willow island, and got caught, so they had ter swim ashore."

"I was with the Sioux and we found 'em gone and the next day ther secret come out of how they levanted."

"I got ther braves ter hide ther raft, thinkin' it might come in use some day, and now it's jist what we needs."

"Sure; but how is yer ter git it?"

"Thar is a bar puts down below the island, and we kin go along that to ther hidin'-place of ther raft, git aboard and sail down ther stream so slick; them as follows us won't know how we got away."

"I'm with yer, pard," was the eager answer of Bricktop, and they rode into the stream, Buck Baldwin leading the way.

But as their spirits arose at their chance of throwing all pursuit off their trail, Dashing Charlie's went down, for he began to realize that when tracked to the river, as he knew that pursuit would follow his absence, even Girard, the guide, and Pawnee Pete could not discover where the trail of his kidnappers left the stream, and the presence of a raft hidden among the willows they would never suspect, he was certain.

CHAPTER X.

THE VOYAGERS.

THE two kidnappers and their prisoner rode into the stream, Buck Baldwin leading.

Leaving the direct ford across, they held on to the willow island.

This had originally been a sand-bar, which had caught driftwood, then soil, and was forming into what would become in time firm land.

It had a few scattering willows growing upon it, and from either bank appeared to be wholly under water, which was not, however, the case.

Baldwin led the way to the lower point of the island, the horses being breast deep at times, and now and then having to swim.

He skirted the edge of the island and came to a clump of willows, where, as he had said, was a raft of logs.

It was some twenty feet long by twelve in depth, and had been pinned together by cross-logs, and securely bound at the corners with leather reins, lariats, and other things which the troopers could spare for the purpose.

"It will hold the three horses and us easy," said Bricktop.

"Oh yes, for it held the whole gang o' troopers and their horses; but we musn't ride out o' ther water in case them fellers comes arter us here, for if they seen our tracks here it would give it away that we hed a boat."

"How will we git ther horses onter ther thing?"

"We kin do it easy, and this kid hev got ter help."

"Ef he makes a break ter git away he'll die, sart'in' as lead will kill."

"I'll not help you in the slightest way, so put that in your pipe and smoke it," said Charlie, bluntly.

"Waal yer will, or I'll make yer."

"I do not fear your killing me, for you did not capture me to do that, and you cannot drive me against my will."

"Don't fight with ther kid, Buck, for we is losin' time, and yer fergits thet Cap'n Emmett hev got Girard as guide and thet Injun Pawnee Pete too, and they hain't ter be fooled with, so let us git away frum here."

"All right, Bricktop, we'll do it, for you is right."

"Now, sonny, as yer won't help us we'll fix yer so yer can't help yerself," and Buck Baldwin at once bound Charlie's feet together also and laid him upon the raft.

There were two long poles on the raft, and they were to be used in guiding it down the stream.

The horses were then forced to jump upon it and were securely hopped and tied together, after which the two men poled out of the little basin, not having touched foot on the land to leave a track.

Once free of the willows the raft was caught by the current and borne swiftly down the stream.

The horses had been blindfolded, to prevent their being frightened, and were then unhopped, so as to be able to swim if a wreck occurred.

But Charlie was left bound hands and feet, and could not but feel that he would be the sufferer if plunged into the river.

But he would not beg for his release, and so sat up on the raft, really enjoying the strangely exciting and novel voyage.

With his wounded shoulder Bricktop could not be of much service with a pole, so stood forward to watch for breakers ahead, while Buck Baldwin having made the long pole fast to the rear of the raft, used it to steer by.

Down the stream the voyagers went, at times gaining a speed that was alarming, where there

was a shoal, and causing Bricktop to say, as the raft undulated so as to make the horses very unsteady:

"Great goodness! how she wobbles, Pard Buck."

"Yas, it hain't jist pleasant sailin'; but ef ther sogers with Buffalo Bill c'u'd stand it I guesses we kin."

"Yas, I guesses so; but how far down ther river be you goin'?"

"Some thirty mile or more, I'm thinkin', fer it hain't takin' us out o' our way, and Cap'n Emmett will hev the river tanks s'arched for many a mile up and down, ter see whar our trail leaves ther water."

"Yer is correct, for he will do it; but if they follows our trail they has got ter swim fer it."

"Yas, thet are so; but we will hold on until night, and then tie up, for we will be some fifteen mile down ther river at sunset, and I hev no idee o' running this river in the dark."

"Nor me, pard."

"Thar is a shoal below thet forms rapids, but jist whar I doesn't know, yet I don't want ter git inter 'em without knowin' jist whar we is ter come out."

"You bet that's so," for we wants ter know the end afore we gits there."

"I'll tell you what the end will be," spoke up Charlie, who was watching the scenery and enjoying the situation in spite of his being a prisoner.

"What will be ther end, kid?" growled Bricktop.

"The rope end for both of you," and Charlie laughed, while his captors swore at him, not relishing the joke at their expense.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RAPIDS.

IN spite of their watchfulness, and dread of running into the rapids by night, just that did happen to the kidnappers.

The sun was near the horizon, and Buck Baldwin had just said to his comrade that it would be well to look out for a camping-place, when they swept around a bend in the river, and the rapids were in full view, not half a mile below them.

Baldwin uttered a cry of alarm, and called to Bricktop to come quickly to his aid.

The latter responded promptly, and they tried to turn the craft shoreward, but in vain.

The water there was very deep, and the pole would not touch bottom, while it was too slender to do much service as a rudder.

In vain they strove, for the raft would not go toward one shore or the other, and its speed constantly increased as it neared the rapids.

The latter were visible plainly now, here and there rocks rising above the waters, and all a mass of foam.

"Great Lord! Pard, we can't never make it!" cried Bricktop in alarm.

"It do look dubious, but, exceptin' whar ther leetle rock islands be, they says ther stream is deep, so we kin git through, I hopes and guesses," answered Baldwin.

"Don't you think you should unbind me so I can save myself if we do strike, and the raft goes to pieces?" asked Dashing Charlie, calmly.

"No, for we both swims well, and kin save yer, and we don't intend ter give yer no chance ter git away," Baldwin answered.

"No, we doesn't, you bet! for I hain't fergot this wound yer give me," growled Bricktop.

"All right; if I drown, you go with me, and that will be some satisfaction," was Charlie's cool remark, though his heart almost sunk within him at the threatened danger.

There seemed an almost certainty of death for the brave boy, and never in his life before had it seemed so near to him.

His memory flew back over his past life, the ones so dear to him in his Kentucky home, and for a moment he bitterly regretted having left there.

The sun had disappeared now, and the banks were high and heavily timbered, causing the river to be cast in shadow.

The rapids were just ahead, their roar reaching the ears of the voyagers upon the raft, and causing the horses to become very uneasy.

By giant efforts with the poles the two men were gradually nearing the right bank, but it seemed very doubtful whether they would reach it or not.

"Will you please let me go?" asked Charlie as he saw the increasing danger.

"No, for if we strikes, we saves you."

"But will you not need all your strength to save yourselves?"

"No, we'll git ashore, and you too."

Charlie said no more, but tugged hard at the bonds about his wrists.

He saw that darkness was settling fast, the rapids were right ahead, the bank some sixty yards away, and the raft seemed doomed.

At last, to his joy, his right hand slipped free of the bonds, though his left was yet secure and bound to his feet.

At the same instant there came a warning cry from Buck Baldwin, and both men worked hard with the poles.

But in vain, for they could not steer the raft clear of a rock just ahead, and going like a race-horse it was dashed hard upon it.

There was a terrific shock, a crashing of logs, and the men and horses were plunged into the rapids.

Charlie, in his helpless state, had seized upon a log with his one free hand, and felt it hold fast.

He had been forward upon the raft, and this end had been driven far up on the ragged rock that had wrecked them.

A part of the raft had thus hung there, while the others, torn apart, had swept on down the rapids.

The horses had been freed of their blindfolds also, and were hurled into the swift current beyond the rocks, when they instinctively struck out for the shore near by.

To one of them had Bricktop clung, and aiding himself all he could he was thus drawn ashore, while Buck Baldwin, a splendid swimmer, also reached the bank.

He saw in the gathering gloom the three horses and ran up the bank toward them.

"Hello, Bricktop, you are safe?"

"Yes; but where is the boy?"

"Drowned sure, for he was bound hand and foot."

"Cuss it! that's too bad, hain't it?"

"It is; but it were done so sudden, I c'u'dn't git to him, and had all I c'u'd do to save myself."

"But we is safe and so is ther critters, and now ter see ef ther matches is dry, and we kin build a fire, fer we must camp right here fer ther night."

"You bet we must, pard," was the answer, and as the matches, wrapped in rubber, were found to be all right, a fire was soon kindled and the wet saddles, traps and clothing spread out around it to dry.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

WHEN Dashing Charlie was thrown forward upon the raft, the shock was a severe one, and the spray dashed over him in huge waves.

He grasped a log with his only free hand, and held on for life.

What became of the others in the blinding spray and darkness he could not see, and he gave himself up for lost.

Yet still he clung on like grim death, while the logs surged and tossed wildly about, threatening to break away from the rock and dash on down the rapids.

But the bow of the raft had driven on with such force as to hold fast, though half of the aft part had been torn away, and logs were breaking loose each moment from what remained.

As soon as he could do so, Charlie managed to work his way further up on the logs, and at last reached the top of the rock.

The spray broke over it in torrents, the waters being checked momentarily by the logs.

But the rock was some five feet above the current, and though only a few feet in size, it yet was a shelter from death, though one to afford no protection from the elements.

Drenched to the skin, and with darkness around him, the waters surging about him and the spray almost blinding his eyes as it dashed into his face, the position of the boy was one of greatest peril and horror.

He had eaten nothing since early morning, and his bound hands and feet pained him greatly.

At last he got into a position where he could endeavor to use his right hand in freeing his left, without danger of being washed off of the rock, which he had to guard against continually.

But the bonds had become so wet he could not untie the knots about his wrist, and so he tried those upon his ankles.

In this, after a long while, he was more successful, for he managed to free one leg of the bonds, and he was so worn out with the effort that he left the rope dangling about the other.

Still his feet were free, if one was hampered

by the ropes, and he congratulated himself upon having accomplished this much.

He saw that the raft was gradually breaking up, for the action of the water tore off log after log, which went dashing on down the current.

That the two kidnappers had escaped Charlie discerned when he saw a fire flare up in the timber on the right hand of the river.

He had hoped that they at least had been lost, and was disappointed at the sight he beheld.

There glimmered a cheerful camp-fire, and its light revealed the two men hanging out their things to dry, while they were near the warmth which the chilled boy so much needed.

The camp-fire showed also that the men had unsaddled their horses and staked them out, and Charlie discerned his own animal among them.

Then supper was cooked, and now and then the wind wafted a sniff of broiling bacon and boiling coffee to the nostrils of the hungry boy, who muttered in a tone of almost despair:

"I am starving to death, I do believe."

For a moment hunger made Charlie forget his great peril; but as another large part of the raft went whirling away he was recalled to his dangerous situation most vividly.

"If I only had my other arm free, and could get this rope off my leg, I would swim as best I could to the shore, capture their horses and make for the train."

"But this rope holds me like iron," and he tugged in vain at the rope about his waist, to which his left hand was too securely bound to free.

It would have been a hard swim for the boy, but as the horses and the kidnappers had made the shore, he did not doubt but that he could.

Of course if he did not get his arm free he would not dare attempt the swim, and in the morning the men would discover him there, and he would be again a prisoner.

But in this there was a chance for life, while to remain on the rock, bound as he was, should they go away and leave him, supposing that he was drowned, would be his certain death, he knew.

"If I only dared risk going on the rest of the raft."

"But then it might strike on rocks below, and that would end me."

"What to do I do not know," and the brave boy felt despair clutching at his heart.

True he had it in his power to call to the men, should they attempt to depart before dawn, and they might rescue him.

But what would follow the rescue?

That question he could not answer.

Thus the night of horror wore away, until at last the faint glimmer of dawn was visible in the east, and the watching, waiting boy saw one of his foes arise from his blankets and throw wood upon the camp-fire, which had almost burned out.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SECRET.

THE kidnappers were too glad at their escape from death, to grumble at the discomforts they had to suffer.

Their blankets were wet, their provisions also, and they had been drenched to the skin.

But they built a large fire, hung everything before it to dry, cooked supper, and then sat down to smoke and discuss the situation, having dried their tobacco in the fryingpan before getting anything to eat.

"Pard, I hates ter lose thet kid," at last said Buck Baldwin, starting the conversation by reference to the young prisoner, whom he supposed to be at the bottom of the river.

"Yes, it's bad, but it kinder makes my wound feel better ter feel he went down as he did, tied hand and foot."

"I tell yer, Buck, he give me a very close call."

"It are true, Bricktop, thet he did; but let me tell yer thet we has missed more than you knows."

"How does yer mean?"

"Waal, I might as well tell yer ther truth, you has ter know, I guesses, so as ter help me out in ther game."

"What game?"

"Kin yer keep yer mouth shut when need be?"

"Hasn't I shown it, pard?"

"Yes, 'cepting when you is drinkin', and then yer knows it all; but as there hain't no licker here, and no chance ter git any, I'll tell yer a secret."

"What does yer know?"

"You knows how anxious I was ter git a hold on ther boy?"

"Cap'n Emmett's nephew as was drowned ter-night?"

"Of course."

"Well, what is yer shoowing crooked at now?"

"What does yer mean?"

"Why don't yer out with it?"

"You see, pard, it are jist this, thet I were most anxious ter git ther boy 'cause it were for what he was worth."

"Yer told me that afore, and he wasn't so rich arter all."

"No, but his uncle is."

"Ther cap'n?"

"Yes."

"And he'll keep what he's got."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because we'll make him divvy."

"How so?"

"Yer must understand ther cap'n has a secret and one thet hain't much use ter him now."

"What is it?"

"He knows whar there is a gold mine."

"Yer don't say so?"

"Waal, he does; but as it are right in ther heart o' ther Injun country he c'u'dn't git to it without a regiment o' soldiers at his back."

"I see."

"Yer remembers Nick Nye?"

"I does."

"Well, we all know'd thet he had struck it rich."

"We thought as how he had."

"I know'd it, for Nick told me so."

"Did he tell yer whar ther dust was?"

"No, but I was a-goin' in pards with him when he come back from Omaha, whar he went ter get a outfit and got inter a row thet cost him his life."

"So I remembers, and he died without telling any body whar his find was."

"No he didn't."

"How does yer know?"

"I knows that when they jumped onter him in Omaha, Cap'n Emmett chipped in and tuck his part, and beat off the gang."

"But Nick hed got his death wound and he was took to ther cap'n's camp, whar he lived for a week."

"Now he were most thankful to the cap'n for chipping in ter save him, and for nussin' him jist like a brother, and he asked him ter send word home to his folks."

"This the cap'n did, for he went East soon arter, and jist come back a short while before he started for this fur-tradin' expedition."

"And is yer sart'in Nick told him about ther mine?"

"Now, pard, Nick were in his mind up to ther last, and were thankful fer all thet Cap'n Emmett hed done fer him, so you bet he told him all about it, whar it were located, and jist how ter git thar."

"I for one knows thet he were a-askin' about raisin' a comp'ny ter go inter ther Injin country, when he come back from fur-tradin' this trip, and found men wouldn't go unless he took several hundred along, and he said thet was too many for ther profits."

"Now whar was he intendin' ter go, except thar to Nick Nye's mine?"

"It do look thet way, pard."

"It are thet way, and my idee was ter git hold of ther boy and put him ag'in' ther secret Cap'n Emmett holds."

"How so?"

"Jist tell him ter give us ther secret, fer we kin go among ther Sioux, and accept a share from us in return for givin' him up ther boy."

"But ef he refused?"

"Why we c'u'd kill the boy, or raise him among the Injuns."

"And now we has lost him."

"Yes, but ther cap'n are alive, and we kin kidnap him and force ther secret from him."

"Pard, yer is a dandy," was the energetic response of Bricktop, at this proposition of his companion.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NOVEL CHASE.

BUCK BALDWIN seemed pleased with the compliment of his friend, in his remark that he was a dandy.

He smiled blandly, with an expression that seemed to show that he was aware of possessing the virtue of being "a dandy," whatever that meant, and remarked:

"Well, I hain't slow, Pard Bricktop, and I sees things without spectacles, now you can bet."

"And yer sees ther chance o' ropin' in Cap'n Emmett, now we has lost ther kid?"

"Yas, and holdin' him until he gives us ther

secret, or dies, fer he has got to do one or t'other, yer kin gamble on it."

"Jist so, for I sings ther same tune; but how is it ter be did?"

"We is ter lay fer ther comin' back o' ther fur-traders, lead 'em into a ambush, and wipe 'em out, all except ther cap'n, who are too precious ter kill, yer knows."

"That's biz, pard."

"Yas, and we'll talk it over, so thar will be no mistake; but now I is nigh played out, and as our blankets is dry, I shall turn in fer ther night."

"Me, too," was Bricktop's answer, and the two villains were soon fast asleep.

It was just growing light when Buck Baldwin arose and threw some wood upon the fire.

Then he went to lead the horses to water and stake them out upon a fresh grazing-ground.

He had gotten his horse down to the river, when, in the increasing light, he gazed out upon the waters to note the rock which had wrecked the raft.

He saw it looming up above the others, the spray dashing over it, and his eyes detected quickly that a few logs of the raft yet held together, lodged upon the rock.

Was it a log that he saw upon the rock, moving with the motion of the waters?

No, it was no log, but a human form, and a closer look revealed the fact distinctly.

Instantly his voice rung out loudly:

"Ho, Pard Bricktop! ther boy hain't dead yet."

"Come quick, fer he are out on ther rocks."

A shout from the camp told him that he had aroused his companion, who came running toward him.

But as he did so the remnant of the raft swung clear of the rock, and went whirling and dashing away down through the rapids.

"Oh, Lordy! the tboy hev got on ther raft and set it a-goin'!" yelled Baldwin.

It was true, for Charlie had noted that the men would soon discover him in the daylight, and he observed that the logs of the raft that remained were so well bound together as to resist the action of the waters.

He also saw that they could readily be moved from their position and sent down the stream.

He glanced down through the rapids, and saw that not a single log had lodged below.

There seemed to be an open space through which they had passed on down the river, and the raft would do the same, he thought.

Could he run the gantlet of the rapids, he hoped to get the raft ashore, and with the day before him, make his way on after the train of the fur-traders.

It was worth the risk at any rate, he decided, and so he worked hard, hampered as he was by having but one arm free, and soon set the raft adrift.

He had hoped to have it dash away without being seen; but the quick eyes of Buck Baldwin had sighted him, and he saw that it was a chance of death among the rapids and of captivity if he missed being killed or drowned.

So Charlie set his teeth firmly, threw himself down upon the now small raft, and awaited the ordeal of running the gantlet of death.

He felt the logs working terribly, was tossed about wildly, and several severe shocks came as the raft struck a rock on one side, then the other, and again beneath the surface of the waters.

He could not see the shore for the splashing of the spray, nor could he hear the voices of the men on account of the roaring waters.

On, on he went, tearing along like a mad racer, whirling, surging, tossing about, his raft staggering under the blows it received, and at last floating clear of the last rock, having run the gantlet of the rapids with its boy navigator.

Then, as the stream broadened, and the banks became low and level, Dashing Charlie saw his two foes mounted and in hot pursuit.

"If I had only started before it was dawn," he muttered to himself regretfully.

But it was too late to repine, for there he saw Baldwin and Bricktop flying along on horseback in full chase of the raft which was plowing so swiftly along.

It was a novel chase, and one which seemed about equal between fugitive and pursuers.

CHAPTER XV.

AFLOAT AND ASHORE.

THE sight was a strange one.

The sun was just peering above the horizon and the raft was plainly visible whirling along down the river at a pace of six miles an hour.

The brave boy was seated upon his frail sup-

port, master of the situation, and attentively regarding all that passed.

Ashore was Buck Baldwin on horseback and in hot pursuit.

Far back up the river came Bricktop, mounted upon his own horse and leading Dashing Charlie's.

Having discovered the seeming escape of the boy, just as he had observed him in the gray light of early dawn, Buck Baldwin had brought his comrade quickly to his side with his cry of alarm.

Bricktop realized the situation at a glance and called out:

"What's ter be done, Pard Buck?"

"You git ther camp outfit tergether and follow me quick as yer can."

"And you?"

"I'll follow ther boy down ther river and head him off at ther ford some miles below."

"It's our only chance, Bricktop," and with this, Baldwin hastily ran back with his horse to the camp and threw on his saddle and bridle.

"Don't lose no time, pard, but come along," he cried and away dashed the horseman.

Bricktop gathered the blankets, drying clothes and the rest of the outfit together with all haste, unmindful of the pain his wounded arm gave him, and then saddled his own and Dashing Charlie's horse.

Strapping the traps on Charlie's horse he mounted and rode away in pursuit of Baldwin, now a mile away.

When going through the rapids the raft had fairly flown along, and Charlie had bright hopes of escape.

But once through the rapids the stream began to lessen in the speed of its current and soon came down to about four miles an hour.

Then it was that Buck Baldwin began to gain upon the raft.

But a break in the bank, just as he came up with it, forced him to make a detour which caused him to lose time, and the raft once more got ahead.

Seeing his pard turn out to head a ravine, Bricktop from far in the rear rode obliquely and thus gained considerable in time and distance.

Once more Buck Baldwin got up with the raft, and as he galloped along the shore, not fifty yards away from it, he threw his rifle to his shoulder and called out:

"Say, boy, bring that raft inshore."

"What for?" asked Charlie in a tantalizing way.

"Because I order you to do so, boy."

"It's not a sufficient reason, old man," was the defiant reply.

"Then I shall shoot you if you do not obey."

"What will you shoot with?"

"My rifle."

"It got wet and won't fire."

"It will, for all our ammunition was in a rubber bag and kept dry."

"Will you obey?"

"No."

"I will shoot you, I tell you."

"You didn't kidnap me to kill me."

The man uttered a curse and Charlie laughed, though he felt in no laughing mood.

But he was one to keep his courage up at all odds.

Then Buck Baldwin raised his rifle and sent a bullet over the boy's head.

"You see I can shoot."

"Will you come now?"

"Don't you know I am tied and could not if I wanted to?"

"That's so: but how did you keep on the raft?"

"Just stuck to it, that's all."

As Charlie had not shown that one hand was free, and his feet also, and remembering how well he had tied him, Buck Baldwin realized the absurdity of asking him to bring the raft ashore.

He knew that the raft would keep in mid-stream, where the current was, and thus elude him.

But he knew the country pretty well and was aware that several miles below was a buffalo ford, which the Indians also made use of.

The water there was not deeper than up to his saddle-skirts, and he could ride on ahead, enter the river and catch the raft as it went by.

So he called out:

"I'll catch you yet, boy."

"How'll you do it, man?" was the rejoinder of Charlie, who called his foe *man* in retaliation for being called *boy*.

"I'll show you how I'll do it," was the answer, as Baldwin spurred his horse into a run, just as Bricktop had nearly overtaken him.

"You keep even with the raft, pard, for I'm a-goin' on ter head him off," shouted Baldwin over his shoulder.

He readily gained on the raft, while Bricktop came up even with it and called out:

"Yer honery young scamp, how did yer keep from drownin'?"

"Maybe it's because I'm like you, you honery horse-thief, for you've got my horse."

"And I'll have my grip on you soon, too."

"I doubt it."

"How did yer escape drownin', I asked yer?"

"Because I fear I am like you, I told you."

"How is that?"

"Born to be hanged, maybe."

Now it was Bricktop's time to swear, and he did it with considerable vim, while Charlie laughed at him.

"Yer'll change that laughin' tune to cryin' afore long."

"I reckon not, pard."

"Well, we'll see, when Pard Buck gits whar he kin head yer off."

And as the man spoke Charlie looked ahead and saw that Buck Baldwin had reached a point of land far down the stream and was riding out into the river, as though to intercept him.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXPERT WITH THE LASSO.

CHARLIE EMMETT was in a quandary, and a serious one.

It was true that he might get by Buck Baldwin and keep on down the river.

The horse of the kidnapper could not outrun the river very far, he knew.

But where would he go?

What was before him?

There were other rapids he felt sure, and alone, hampered by his bonds, unarmed and without food, all looked very black for him.

On the other hand he had the horror of again falling into the hands of his foes.

What they meant to do with him he did not know, could not tell.

Had robbery alone been their object they would have taken what he had at first and let him go.

Had they wanted to kill him they would have done so long before.

To fall into their hands again meant food and rest doubtless, and a chance to dry his clothes and get warm, for he was chilled to the bone.

"I reckon I can get a chance to escape."

"At any rate it won't be so bad as to be here on these logs, going I know not where."

"I guess, as I can't help myself, I will let that fellow head me off, and I don't want him to make any mistake about it either," and Charlie felt relieved at deciding in a way he could not help doing.

Buck Baldwin in the mean while had ridden down to where he knew there was a ford.

With unerring instinct, as is more often the case with dumb beasts than human beings, the buffalo had selected the best spot for a ford.

A bend of the river sent a point of land far out into the stream, and along this they had gone.

From this point a bar extended, and as the other shore was low and shallow there was but a short distance where the water was deep, the river being wide there.

Out upon this point, to the buffalo and deer ford, rode Baldwin, and he pressed on until his horse went breast deep in the water.

From where he was to the shoals on the other shore was not over a hundred feet, and through this gantlet the coming raft must pass.

Baldwin had taken in the situation thoroughly, and had evidently made up his mind as to what he would do.

Like a great many of the bordermen, who had ranged in their wanderings down into Texas and New Mexico, Baldwin carried a lariat. And he knew how to use it well, too.

He had run it through his hands to soften it, after its getting so wet, and held the noose and coil ready to throw.

The raft would hardly pass out of range, he felt sure, as he noted where it was coming down the current.

The boy might, with his feet, urge the raft toward the other shore beyond his reach, and yet perhaps he would not do so.

If the boy lay flat upon the raft, of course, he could not catch him in the noose; but the man had noticed that several of the logs had ridden over the others, and there were ends sticking up a couple or more feet which he could catch a hold upon.

These should be his aim if the boy dodged, yet he was careful not to reveal his lasso to Charlie's eyes, as he thought.

The river being wide there the current at that point was not very swift, and by riding toward the upper end of the bar, Baldwin felt that he could hold the raft if he caught it, before it dragged his horse into deep water.

Then he could tow the float and his boy prisoner ashore, where Bricktop would again compliment him upon being "a dandy."

Charlie, however, did see the lariat, and recognize the purpose of the man.

So, far from wishing not to be noosed, having made up his mind that it was the best thing to be done, he was anxious and willing to be caught, though he did not intend to appear to be so.

Had he not been a youth of great judgment, who grasped a situation for and against most thoroughly, he would have recklessly endeavored to run the gantlet and thus go to his death perhaps.

So down the stream floated the raft with its prisoner, who was watchful of the chances for and against his being caught, while the kidnapper waded as far into the river as he dared do, and held his lariat ready to throw.

Nearer came the raft, and as it floated within range the desperado threw his lasso, the noose settled over the head of Dashing Charlie catching him fairly, and causing him to cling hard to the logs with his unbound hand to prevent being drawn off as the lariat became taut, nearly dragging the horse off his footing with the force of the current.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONCE AGAIN A PRISONER.

FROM the lips of Buck Baldwin a burst of triumph rung out at his success, which was echoed by Bricktop ashore.

The man had calculated well, and knew that he was an expert with the lasso.

He saw that the raft was coming within easy range, and had noted that Charlie was in a line with one of the logs that stood several feet above the others.

If he missed the boy he must catch the log.

The boy, too, did not appear to understand his intentions, for he sat up straight, his eyes regarding him closely.

Buck Baldwin did not know how fearful Dashing Charlie was just then that he might not catch him.

But the lariat-thrower did not miss his aim; the noose settled down near Charlie, the raft swung around, and the lasso became taut.

Then came the tug, for would the footing of the horse remain firm, or would he be dragged by the raft into deep water and be drowned?

Or would the rider have to cut the raft loose and let it go?

The horse felt the strain, as the lariat tightened, and was dragged along a few steps.

But the rider had wisely ridden upon the bar as far from deep water as possible, thus giving a chance to check the raft, and thus he was able to do so.

Once the force of checking the raft was over, Baldwin grasped the lasso in his hand and began to move slowly back along the bar toward the shore, where Bricktop awaited him with a diabolical grin of satisfaction upon his ugly face.

"Yer got him, pard, neat and sart'in," he called out, as Baldwin drew nearer, turning the raft.

"Yes, I has him," was the cool response, and then came the compliment from Bricktop, which the victor proudly hoped for.

"You is a dandy, and don't you forgit it, Pard Buck!"

The expression upon the face of Baldwin showed that he did not intend to forget it, and fully concurred in the opinion of his friend in his admiration of Buck Baldwin, desperado at large.

Finding that the raft was shoaling on the bar, Baldwin went back and took out his knife to set free Charlie's legs for him to wade ashore.

To his amazement he saw that the youth had partly saved him the trouble, as he had the rope that had bound both dangling to one ankle, while his right hand was free, the left alone being secured to the belt about his waist.

"Waal, ef you hain't almost got away I'll be darned," he said in a surprised tone.

"If I had'n't been able to free one hand I'd have been at the bottom of the river now."

"How did yer do it?"

"I just worked away until I got one hand free."

"Well, you is ther slickest kid I ever seen, and it will be hard ter watch yer."

"But I guess yer hev hed a hard night of it, so I'll let yer go free fer a leetle while and git

breakfast, for we hain't hed nothing ter eat yet."

"Well, I am glad you have not, for I am as hungry as a bear."

They had now reached the shore, and Bricktop greeted the youth with the remark:

"Yer is back ag'in is yer?"

"I am here," was the cool response.

"Yer ought ter be all-fired thankful ter my pard Baldwin fer saving yer life."

"Well, I am not, as I have nothing to thank him for, for he got me into the danger."

"Yer will hev ter hev yer spurs clipped, youngster, for yer is too fresh and sassy."

"But, stir yerself and get wood, for we wants breakfast right away."

Thus encouraged Charlie soon gathered a lot of wood, a fire was built and the coffee-pot and frying-pan put on.

The men rested while the boy worked, after Buck Baldwin had given the warning:

"Keep away from near ther hosses, boy, and ef we sees any funny business on your part we'll just clap ther ropes onto yer ag'in."

This decided Charlie to make no attempt to escape, though he had made up his mind, hungry as he was, he would endeavor to gather wood near where the horses were feeding and suddenly pull up the stake-rope of his horse, leap upon his back and escape.

But he saw that he was too closely watched, and felt that any act of his just then would be thwarted.

"Yer ought ter be awful good ter my pard here fer saving yer life, kid," said Bricktop, as they gathered around the edibles prepared for breakfast.

"He saved me from escaping down the river, that is all, and I have nothing to thank him for," was the cool reply.

Charlie enjoyed his breakfast greatly, and afterward was tied to his saddle, and the two men crossed the river at the ford, and started off on a trail, while they seemed to know well and just where it would end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RENEGADES.

CHARLIE soon discovered that his two captors were more than ever suspicious of him, and it was complimentary to him to feel that he was so closely watched.

Bricktop still nursed his wounded shoulder, and at every twinge of pain from it would swear at the boy, who showed no regret for his act.

Baldwin led the way, and held the end of the rope about the neck of Charlie's horse.

He seemed to fully understand the course he was taking, and Bricktop followed with perfect confidence in the lead of his pard.

They camped for dinner in the middle of the day, and again Charlie was freed from his bonds, to gather wood, build a fire and do the cooking.

He was becoming a very fair cook, from his experience thus far in wild life, and he broiled a venison steak in a way that was very tempting.

At night another camping-place was found, and what surprised Dashing Charlie was the fact that the two men did not seem to have any fear about building a fire, and both turned in for a sleep, neither standing watch.

As his blankets were dry, and he was very tired, he said he would lie down early.

But he had to wash the tin plates and frying-pan first, get wood for breakfast, and have all in readiness for an early start the following morning.

Then Baldwin was very careful to see that he was again securely bound before he went to his blankets.

The men showed no dread of pursuit, and appeared to feel no fear of red-skins, while the fur-traders, as many as they were and thoroughly armed and equipped, were most careful to have a guard set and either Girard the guide or Pawnee Pete were scouting about the camp at night.

Yet these two men held no dread of red-skins, to the great surprise of the boy captive.

After supper Charlie went to his blankets, just as night fell, and worn out by his loss of rest the night before, and his hard work of the day, he was soon fast asleep, in spite of his being firmly bound.

The men followed his example soon after and the camp was as quiet as a grave.

But at dawn Baldwin called the youth, who had slept like a log, and releasing him from the ropes that firmly secured him, ordered him to get breakfast.

Poor Charlie awoke to realize his situation, and at first felt very gloomy at the thought that he was still a prisoner.

But he soon rallied, though he kept a look-

out for the coming of his uncle, which he fondly hoped for.

The men too, in spite of their having covered up their trail so thoroughly by taking to the raft, also appeared a trifle anxious, and they were soon on the way once more.

"See here, men, where are you taking me?" suddenly asked Charlie as they were riding along the trail.

"You'll find out when we git yer thar," was the abrupt answer of Bricktop.

"Now what have I done that you should treat me as you do?"

"You'll find that out in time too."

"I reckon you've got the wrong boy."

"You is Cap'n Emmett's nephew, hain't yer?"

"Yes."

"Then yer is ther right one."

"Ab, you are punishing me because you have a grudge against my uncle?"

"Waal that is about ther size of it; hain't he a good guesser, Bricktop?"

"He be for sart'in."

Charlie asked no more but became interested in the scenery through which they were passing, and which was wild in the extreme.

At last Baldwin said:

"See here, young fellow, does you know what become of our pard, Barney?"

"Ob, he was your pard was he?"

"He were a most dear and intimate friend."

"Well he met with an accident."

"How were thet?"

"He came skulking around camp at night to kill me, and got the medicine himself."

"What were thet?"

"Lead pills."

"You was ther doctor thet give 'em?"

"Yes, I saved my life by taking his."

Charlie regretted his words at once after uttering them; but having said what he did he would not back down from it.

"I see, and yer hears what he says, Pard Bricktop?"

"I does."

"And now tell us about our dear Pard Limber Joe?"

Having said what he had, Charlie boldly answered:

"Ob, he lost his life at a necktie party."

"He were hanged?"

"Yes."

"What fer?"

"He came out as my guide to overtake the fur-traders' train, and sought, with Barney, to kill and rob me."

"But I turned the tables on Barney, managed to make Limber Joe a prisoner, and he deserted me hoping the Indians would kill me."

"He went to my uncle's camp, told his story, and my uncle came back on the trail, rescued me, and your dear friend Limber Joe got hanged."

"Now you know the story just as it was."

The two men glanced at each other with knowing looks, and it was in the mind of each one that they had a dangerous young customer to deal with.

An hour after they came in sight of a party of Indians coming along the trail, and Charlie quickly called out:

"See those red-skins yonder?"

"Ob, yes, and we is glad ter see 'em, for they is our friends."

"Are they Sioux?"

"Yes."

"Then you are renegades, for only a renegade white man could be friends with the Sioux," said Charlie indignantly.

"Waal, they is our friends and we is takin you to their village, and thar you is ter stay," was the remark of Buck Baldwin.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ARRIVAL IN CAMP.

It was with a sad heart that Captain Emmett went on his way with his train.

Of course, he felt deeply the loss of his nephew, for he was as deeply attached to the boy as though he were his own son.

He could not understand who it was that had captured him, or why they had done so, and the belief would force itself upon him that they were red-skins, and more of them were around in numbers.

As he had not been killed when taken, he held the belief that, being so young, he would not be, and thus would be taken to the village of the Indians and kept as a captive.

In this case, Charlie would show up some day he was sure.

Had it been in his power to do so, he would have let the train go, while he took the back trail to get help for the search for the boy.

But, he could not thus interfere with the plans of the others, and felt compelled to go on.

Every man in the train felt for him, and then too all of them had become greatly attached to the brave lad, and were anxious to save him if they could.

But the trail had been lost, and by Girard the guide, and Pawnee Pete, and the delay and search had resulted in no discovery regarding Charlie's fate, so they had to push on with the train.

All along the way the men saw that Captain Emmett was sorely troubled.

His thoughts were constantly with the boy wondering over his unknown fate, and plotting just how he could rescue him, if alive, and if dead find his destroyers and avenge him.

"I will raise a body of men upon my return, and go into the Indian country, for I know that the commandants of the forts will co-operate with me with soldiers, and give me a strong support," he said to Doctor Chalmers, his partner, one night as they sat in camp.

"It will be hazardous, Emmett, yet it will be about all you can do to learn the fate of poor Charlie, and I will accompany you on the expedition as surgeon, for I am pretty sure you will need one."

"You are a true friend, Doc, and I will accept your services as they are intended, and gladly."

"I feel that the boy is not dead, and if I am right, then he is a captive in the Indian villages."

"Sure, for where else could he be, if a captive?"

"The horses of his two captors were shod, and Pawnee Pete and Girard both knew they were white men; but Indians might have shod horses lately captured, and I lean to the belief that Charlie fell into the hands of Sioux scouts."

"As I do."

"The band was near, but not strong enough to attack us, so they did not show up, and their scouts caught Charlie."

"At least, that is my idea."

"And mine, and they hid their trail by simply knifing their horses in the river and letting the stream carry the bodies, while the men, with Charlie, landed, and on foot left no trail."

"I guess you are right there, Doc, for how else could they have covered up their trail from Pete and Girard?"

"If I am right, then the place to look for Charlie is among the Sioux villages."

"Correct you are, and there I shall search for him, and with force enough to capture him if he is there, and they will not give him up without a fight."

"And he will not be the only white captive you find among them."

"No, I believe you, for there have been many captives taken by them, and I know that the renegades of our own race, who have allied themselves with the Indians, are the ones who plot these captures, as several prisoners have been given up on the payment of ransoms, and this is not Indian work, you may be certain."

"If we could capture a white renegade, Emmett, I would be for showing him no more mercy than I would a snake."

"As I would; but do you know I have another motive for wishing to penetrate the Indian country?"

"Another than the rescue of Charlie?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Well, I am hardly at liberty to tell you now; but we will talk it all over before we go on the expedition."

"You remember I once protected and cared for a white renegade who got into a row in Omaha?"

"Yes, and whom you nursed most tenderly up to the time of his death."

"That is the man, and he told me a secret, made a confession to me, which I am anxious to prove the truth of, and will some day— Ah! who is this?"

"A courier to see you, captain," said a guard, coming forward accompanied by a strange horseman.

CHAPTER XX.

THE COURIER.

THE man who had come up with the guard was heavily-bearded, long-haired, and dressed wholly in buckskin, from moccasins to hunting-shirt.

And the working of the buckskin with beads and quills, showed that it had been done by Indian hands.

He wore a slouch hat, and pinned in it upon

one side was a bunch of eagle-feathers, while about his neck were necklaces of bears' claws and eagle bones.

His eyes were small, piercing and cunning; and he had the look of one half white, half Indian in his nature.

He was splendidly mounted, but rode an Indian saddle and bridle, and though armed with a pair of revolvers and a rifle, carried in addition a scalping-knife and bow and arrows.

"He rode up to my post, sir, and when I challenged him, said he was a courier and wished to see you," explained the guard.

"All right, Simpson, see that his horse is cared for," and turning to the courier, Captain Emmett continued:

"Well, my friend, you are welcome, and we can hunt up some supper for you."

"I thanks yer, cap'n, but I had supper back on the trail; but I'll take a pipeful o' terbacco with yer," was the answer.

"Certainly; here is my pouch, so help yourself, and then tell me what I can do for you."

The man helped himself to the tobacco by taking a pipeful and putting the well-filled pouch absentmindedly into his pocket.

Then he said:

"You see yer can't help me, fer I has come ter help you."

"Ah! and are you a scout from one of the forts?"

"I is not."

"A man who wants a place in the train, and you have followed our trail to get it?"

"I is not."

"Then what is it, my friend?"

"I wants ter save you."

"How, may I ask?"

"I has risked my life to come here ter do it."

"It is very kind of you, and I shall not forget your services, when I know what they are."

"You is goin' to ther upper country ter trade fer furs with ther tame Injuns that hangs about ther river forts."

"Yes."

"Yer'll git thar in a week's time."

"We expect to."

"Waal, pelts is prime jist now and awful plentiful, so yer'll git 'em cheap and make a fortune in yer one expedish."

"Ah! you are a trapper and have pelts to sell?"

"Not adzactly, though I does trap, and I sells what furs I gits my hand onter."

"And you have no pelts now for sale?"

"I hasn't."

"And you are not from the forts?"

"I is not."

"And yet you have come away up here into the Indian country alone?"

"Well I hev come here, as yer see, and I are alone."

"You told the guard that you were a courier," said Captain Emmett with some impatience, while Doc Chalmers laughed, as he saw that the stranger was "beating about the bush" for some reason, or was simply a border crank.

"I told ther guard right—I is a courier—pard, yer looks in a good humor, maybe yere would oblige me with a pipeful o' terbacco."

Captain Emmett laughed now, as Doc Chalmers handed over his pouch, silk and embroidered, a gift from a fair lady friend in the East.

The stranger filled his pipe, and then the pouch disappeared as Captain Emmett's had, in some mysteriously located receptacle called a pocket.

"See here, my friend, I did not give you the pouch," cried Doc Chalmers quickly.

"Didn't yer?"

"No."

"Waal, now I thought yer did; but I'll give it back to ye of course," and very deliberately did the stranger empty the contents of the pretty pouch into his own buckskin tobacco bag and hand over the souvenir with the remark:

"Thet rag may be pretty, but yer can't smoke it, and it's terbacco I wants."

"So I see, and having supplied yourself with a month's rations for your Indian meerschaum you ought to feel satisfied," said the doctor, while Captain Emmett now enjoyed the laugh on him.

"I is satisfied, pard."

"And I will be when I know why you came here and call yourself a courier?" the captain said.

"I am a courier."

"And why are you here?"

"Ter see you."

"Do you know me?"

"I does."

"Who am I?"

"Cap'n Emmett ther fur-trader."

"Yes."

"And yer is called 'Old Kentuck' also."

"Yes; but where have you met me before?"

"I never did."

"Then how is it that you know me and come to see me at the risk of your life?"

"Pard, thet is jist what I hev come ter tell yer," was the mysterious answer of the strange man, and he knocked the ashes out of his pipe as he spoke and put on the air of one who had something of importance to communicate.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COURIER'S STORY.

THE manner of the stranger impressed both Captain Emmett and Doctor Chalmers.

He had suddenly changed to one who had something to say which he felt would be listened to by the one he had come to see.

"Well, my friend, let me hear what it is you have to say?" said Captain Emmett.

"This gent is your pard?"

"Yes, my partner in the expedition and my friend."

"What I has ter say kin be said afore him?"

"Yes."

"I has something ter say that may hit yer hard, cap'n."

"Out with it," was the decided response.

"Has yer lost anything from ther train since yer started?"

"I have lost some good men in an Indian fight we had."

"Nothing else?"

"We have lost none of our stock, if that is what you mean."

"How about a leetle boy?"

"Hal my nephew?"

"That's him."

"What can you tell me of the brave boy?"

"All yer wants ter know."

"He is alive?"

"Yas, and peert as a Injun pony."

"Thank God for that!"

"Yer lost him?"

"He was kidnapped from the train."

"When?"

"Some three weeks ago."

"Who tuk him?"

"I do not know."

"Whar was it?"

"Back on the trail one day, as I said, three weeks ago."

"Didn't yer trail him?"

"Yes, to the river, and there lost his trail."

"Who does yer think captured him?"

"My opinion is that Indians did it."

"Waal, yer is partly wrong, and a leetle right."

"Tell me all you know about him."

"Waal, he war kidnapped by two squaw-men."

"Ah! and then?"

"Was taken to ther Sioux village."

"And he is there now?"

"Yes, pard."

"Which village?"

"Never mind that part of it."

"Under what chief did the two squaw-men serve?"

"That would be tellin'."

"Well, what do you intend to tell me?"

"I am a hunter and trapper, and as I done ther Sioux a big sarvice, warnin' them when ther Pawnees were a-comin' ter attack 'em, they is all friendly to me."

"In other words, you confess yourself to be a squaw-man, a renegade from your own race, living among the Indians, who are our bitter foes?"

"Pard Cap'n, yer is away off ther trail thar."

"What are you, then?"

"I is a man who has had misfortin', and went out inter ther wilderness ter dwell."

"I has my own camp and are alone, but I visits ther Injun villages, and, as I said afore, they is all friendly with me on account of ther sarvice I done 'em."

"But I hain't no squaw-man, nor be I a renegade, for I would be the fu'st one to warn ther whites of ther Injuns was goin' to make a raid on 'em."

"I am glad to know this at least, if it is true."

"It's true as Gospil, cap'n."

"And about my nephew?"

"Waal, yer see ther Injuns were a-raidin' round on yer trail, and they come upon yer nephew and captered him."

"The Indians did?"

"Sure."

"Do Indians ride horses with iron shoes?"

* Men who have married Indian wives, and live in the villages of the red-skins.—THE AUTHOR.

"Some of 'em does when they capters shod horses."

"Well, the trail showed two shod horses."

"Yas."

"And there were red stains on the ground, showing that one of the Indians or my nephew had been wounded."

"He plugged one of the reds, I heerd."

"I am glad of that; but did he kill him?"

"No, pard, only wounded him, and it were well for him thet were all, or ther band would hev hed his scalp."

"I suppose so; but where did they take him?"

"To the band's camp, and then on to ther village."

"How did they go?"

"Thet I doesn't know, pard, not bein' with 'em."

"Where were you?"

"In my lone camp in ther mountings."

"How did you find out the boy was captured?"

"There were two squaw-men as come and told me."

"Well?"

"They come to my camp and told me ther Injuns had captered a boy, and he said he were your nephew, and they was goin' to ther fur country when he got roped in."

"Yes."

"And they said as how they feared it would cause a uprising, as you was pretty powerful when riled up, and the sogers would help yer, so they asked me ter come on arter you, follerin' ther trail of ther train, and negotiate with yer for ther boy's return to yer on yer way ter Omaha."

"Now, Pard Cap'n, yer knows why I am here."

"Yes, I think I do," was Captain Emmett's thoughtful reply, while Doctor Chalmers said decidedly:

"I know I do."

CHAPTER XXII.

DOC CHALMERS'S SUGGESTION.

"I DOES be glad yer understands me, pards," innocently said the strange courier.

"What is your name, my friend?" suddenly asked Captain Emmett, and his eyes were riveted upon the face of the stranger, which the firelight revealed perfectly.

"My name were Si Saunders, when I were home in Virginy; but out here they calls me Lone Rifle."

"Yes, I have heard of a trapper and hunter who was so called."

"Now, let us come to business?"

"Yas, pard."

"You came here, Mister Lone Rifle, as I understand it, to tell me that my nephew had been captured by Indians and taken to their village?"

"That's it, cap'n."

"In that Indian village there are certain squaw-men, or renegades, who fear trouble with the soldiers, as they have captured my nephew, and they wish to give him up?"

"You is correct, cap'n."

"They dared not come themselves into my camp, so sent you?"

"You is talkin'."

"But they wish to get pay for giving up the boy."

"You knows it all."

"In other words they demand a ransom from me, and in return they will give up the boy?"

"Sure."

"When?"

"On yer return from Omaha."

"I see."

"You kin arrange with me whar yer will camp and I'll fetch ther boy inter yer camp."

"Well."

"How is the boy treated meanwhile?"

"Beautiful."

"How do you know?"

"That's what the squaw-men told me."

"Ah, and who are these squaw-men?"

"One is called Bricktop and t'other Buck Baldwin."

"Does yer know 'em, cap'n?"

"Only by hearsay, as two of the grandest rascals that go unbanged to-day."

"Lordy, you is down on 'em."

"I would hang either, or both of them at sight if I caught them to-day."

"My! hadn't they better keep clear o' your camp?"

"Ef they have the slightest desire to live to be hanged later on they had."

"Waal, Pard Cap'n, I guesses it's the old story of give a dog a bad name and there hain't nothin' folks won't say ag'in' him."

"But them men hain't so bad as they is said ter be, though they does live among ther Injuns."

"They wanted ter hev you git ther boy, and they wouldn't see him hurt; but the reds they said they must take his scalp, make an Injun of him, or git pay for sendin' him back to you, one of them three things."

"So Baldwin and Bricktop come ter my cabin and told me all about it."

"Now I hain't no Injun lover to a extent of lovin' 'em more than I does my own people, and feelin' sorry fer ther boy, I says I'll go an negotiate with you, and so here I is, cap'n."

"Well, my friend, I am thankful to you for your services, I assure you; but do you get nothin' out of this?"

"I don't ask for nothin', only I want ter feel I kept ther leetle lad from growin' up a Injun, or bein' scalped."

"Well, it is kind of you at least, and you shall not go unrewarded."

"Lordy, pard, I don't want nothin' for myself, savin' a leetle powder and bullets, and caps, and maybe some terbacco ter chaw and smoke, a couple o' blankets and sich other little things o' no value yer might feel willin' ter give me, along with some coffee and other grub."

"You shall be well remembered, my friend; but now tell me what the demands of those renegades are?"

"Well, cap'n, they wants yer ter say whar yer will camp on a sart'in day, on yer way back ter Omaha, and I'll be thar with ther boy ter git what they wishes you ter give 'em fer ther Injuns, for givin' up yer nephew."

"And how much do they demand?"

"They wants up to ther tune o' five thousand dollars, they says."

"Ah! I see that this demand is not for the Indians, but themselves, for they would satisfy their allies with very little and keep the balance for their own use."

"Now I do not carry a bank with me, and so have no such money along; but I will pay a liberal ransom for the boy's return, when we come back, and we can agree upon what it shall be then, and you can have the boy somewhere near so as to bring him to me when it is settled."

"Waal, cap'n, jist say whar yer will do and whar yer will meet me on yer way back, and I'll return and report to 'em."

"Let me tell you what to do, Emmett," sternly said Doctor Chalmers.

"Well, Doc?"

"Hold this man a prisoner until you get hold of Charlie," was the determined response of Doc Chalmers.

The man started at his words, and he seemed uneasy as he glanced at the captain to note the impression upon him, while he said:

"Hold me, pard, did yer say?"

"Yes, I would, and hang you, too, if that boy was not given up within a given time."

CHAPTER XXIII.

STILL SUSPICIOUS.

It was certain that the suggestion of Doc Chalmers hit the strange courier hard.

He grew quite nervous for a moment, and then asked:

"Lordy, pard, did yer say ye'd hang a innocent man?"

"I don't believe you are innocent, for I think you are the ally of those other renegades to bleed Captain Emmett out of all the gold you can get."

"You have the boy safe, that is certain, and you mean to sell him back to his uncle for every dollar you believe him worth to you."

"Lordy, pard, yer is away off about me."

"Yes, Doc, I think you are severe upon our friend here," said Captain Emmett, mildly.

"You think so, for you believe this man's story, Emmett."

"Now he may be Lone Rifle, and live a hermit-like life as he says; but he is an ally, I'll wager big money, of the white renegades who dwell in the Indian villages, and he is here to make what capital he can out of you for them and himself."

"In that case I say hold him a prisoner until our return and then let his friends know that unless Charlie is brought into camp by a certain time this man hangs, and a raid will follow into the Indian country."

"It would be very hard on him if he is innocent."

"True, and if innocent he would submit to it to save the boy and protect you from renegade thieves."

"He can be treated well and so will not suffer, which Charlie certainly does in that Indian camp."

"No, pard, he has his freedom and is treated fust class by Injuns and all."

"How do you know this, Mr. Lone Rifle?" quickly asked Doc Chalmers.

"I know it because Buck Baldwin and Bricktop told me so."

"Then you were not in the Indian village?"

"I were not."

"The boy has not got his freedom I am sure, or he would have been here, for he is not one to submit to such a life, young as he is, when he could escape."

"Thar hain't no escapin' from thet Injun camp, pards, for I knows thet much."

"Well, captain, you have heard my advice, so do as you deem best."

"How could we communicate the news to the renegades that we have this man a prisoner?" asked Captain Emmett, to the terror of the courier, who began to fear that he was to be held by the trainmen.

"This man could tell you how to send word to them, and he would do so, if you put the rope about his neck."

"Lordy, pard, don't yer talk that way, for I hain't done nothin' ter be roped fer."

"That remains to be seen; but what do you say, Captain Emmett?"

"I would not wish to wrong an innocent man, Doc, and I believe this fellow's story about Charlie, though he may not be all that is good."

"That means you are willing to be bled by those renegade vampires to get the boy back again?"

"I am ready to pay all that I deem a fair price for Charlie's ransom."

"Now yer is talkin', and it's thet only will give yer a chance ever ter see ther boy ag'in."

"You do as I says and I will promise yer ter tarn ther boy over to yer safe and sound on yer way back."

"And what do you say?"

"I says ter pay ther money they demands."

"Five thousand dollars?"

"Thet's the sum."

"I will do no such thing."

"In the first place I have not the money with me, and could not get it this side of St. Louis."

"Then it is out of all bounds to ask such a sum."

"What gold won't get lead and steel will," said Doctor Chalmers, laconically.

"Waal, cap'n, I'll go back and say yer refuses ter trade, and I am sorry, for they'll treat ther boy shameful, them red-skins will, once they knows you won't give 'em money for him."

"And would you see him thus treated, when it is in your power to save him?" sternly asked the captain.

"Pard Cap'n, yer don't know me, and no man does that gent yer calls Doc."

"Yer see I come as a courier from them two renegades, Buck Baldwin and Bricktop, and I tells yer what they says."

"Now you says yer won't pay no big money, but will do what are squar', and thet it will be did when yer comes back."

"But it are my duty as courier ter go and report to 'em as sent me what you says, and then I has done what I agreed ter do."

"Arter that I kin act accordin' to my own idees, and they is ter git ther boy away ther moment I sees any funny business thet these renegades intends ter play."

"So yer see I are ther boy's friend arter all."

"My good friend, I ask your pardon for the doubt I held regarding you, and I assure you that I will trust the safety of little Charlie in your hands, for we can come to terms I am certain," and Captain Emmett held forth his hand which was warmly grasped by Lone Rifle, while Doc Chalmers remarked:

"Well, I still stick to my idea, Emmett, to keep this man a prisoner, and hold his life against that of the boy's."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE COMPACT.

CAPTAIN EMMETT was a kind-hearted man and one who never wronged any one intentionally by word or act.

He felt hurt that his partner, Doctor Chalmers, was still suspicious of the courier, and could not doubt in his own mind that Lone Rifle was just what he professed to be.

So he said:

"Doc, I think you are hard on our friend here, who appears to me to mean well."

"When he proves he is honest, Emmett, I will ask his pardon most humbly and make any amend in my power, even to answering at the revolver's muzzle."

"But until then my idea is that he is an ally of these men, playing it sharp on you, and I

would make him find a way to communicate with his friends and let them know that he is to be held as a hostage against the return of the boy, upon our return trail."

"Could you communicate with your friends, my friend?"

The man saw that the doctor's words held their influence with Captain Emmett, and he grew again uneasy.

But he responded:

"What does yer mean, cap'n?"

"Could you get word to those renegades?"

"I c'u'd go to 'em."

"Yes, and we would never see you or the boy again," bluntly said Doc.

"Could you not let your friends know in some way that we were going to hold you as a prisoner until my nephew was restored to me?"

"Pard Cap'n, I hain't got no way of letting 'em know."

"That is bad."

"I comed here trustin' in yer honor, ter do yer a favor, as I thought, and help ther boy, while I admits frankly I concluded I'd git a leetle pay fer myself."

"And now yer talks o' holdin' me a pris'ner ag'in' ther boy."

"Pard, thet hain't squar', be it?"

Captain Emmett was silent a moment, and then said:

"Doc, I think you are wrong in this case, though I give you credit for reading faces like books."

"I feel certain now that Charlie is not dead, and in the Sioux village, and if alive he is all right, as he is well able to take care of himself."

"As for our visitor here, he can go back to ther renegades and say that I will give them just one thousand dollars in cash for the return of my nephew, and will camp on Bend Creek, after they meet me, or their messenger does, until I send on to Omaha and get it."

"If they do not take that, then I will give our friend here the same sum if he delivers Charlie up to me safe and sound at Canyon Spring or Bend Creek."

"That is my ultimatum, and if my terms are not accepted, I will go after the boy with force enough to take him and visit upon the Sioux a punishment they will long remember, for I can influence the commanders of the forts to send back with me a number of soldiers, in addition to the men I take with me."

"Now, my friend, you know my terms, so you can return to-morrow and report what I say."

"I'll do it, Pard Cap'n, but I think I'd better go ter-night, now I knows ther terms of your compact."

"But may I ask about when yer will be at Canyon Spring?"

"Say three months from to-day, or as near that date as possible."

"Agreed, and ef they doesn't accept yer terms I will, for I'll be thar with ther boy, cap'n, see ef I don't, either tradin' fer Buck and Bricktop, or on my own account, fer I won't see ther lad harmed, as it hain't my natur' ter do so."

"Now, cap'n, I guesses I'll be on ther back trail as it's a long travel."

"All right, if you won't remain all night."

"I guesses I'll go, cap'n."

"Then I will send for your horse," and Captain Emmett called to his negro cook to go and get the courier's horse.

"And, cap'n, yer said nuthin' about some coffee, bacon and other fixins', don't yer recommend?"

Captain Emmett did not remember that he had been the one to say anything about the "coffee and other fixins'," but he ordered a bag of provisions gotten for the man, who then asked for some ammunition, a blanket and several other articles which he said would come useful.

He would have asked for more had not Doc Chalmers uttered an oath and said almost savagely:

"Mark my words, Captain Emmett, you are giving to the hand that will strike at your heart."

CHAPTER XXV.

PAWNEE PETE TAKES THE TRAIL.

The remark of Doctor Chalmers seemed to fairly startle the courier, for he quickly ceased his begging and turned toward his horse, upon which he had packed all that had been given him.

The captain also was struck by the words, which fell upon his ears like a prophetic warning and he turned toward the man and said:

"You hear what my friend here says?"

"I does, cap'n, but he don't know me as you does."

"I is thankful, sir, for all yer has done fer me, and I'll prove it some day, see ef I don't."

"But I'll be goin' now, cap'n, so good-by ter yer, and I'll let ther boy know thet I seen yer, and you is aware he is alive and a-kickin', fer I shall go straight to ther village."

"Which village?" asked Doc Chalmers, quietly.

But the man was not to be caught in the trap of revealing where Charlie was held prisoner; that is, in which one of the Sioux camps he was, and he answered as innocently as though he understood the question that way:

"Ther village whar ther boy is now, pard."

"And which one is that?"

"Ther Sioux village, pard."

"But good-by, cap'n, and good-by to you, pard, though yer doesn't believe I is a honest man."

Doc Chalmers made no reply, other than to mutter something impatiently, and the courier hastened to mount and ride away, for he feared a longer delay in the camp might cause Captain Emmett to be won over into detaining him.

"Emmett?" said Doc Chalmers suddenly, as the man rode away.

"Yes, Doc."

"Will you make me a promise?"

"Certainly."

"And keep it?"

"Of course."

"Then send for Pawnee Pete, whom you can spare for a week or so, and set him to follow that man."

"But why?"

"Well, by following him until to-morrow night he can track him to the Five Trails Forks, as you know, and you are anxious to know in which one of the four Sioux villages Charlie is held."

"I am, indeed; for if I had to go to his rescue I would not know which one to strike."

"Well, when crossing the river at the Five Trails Forks, the man must turn to the right or left trails, as you know."

"Yes."

"If he goes to the left, he will be going to the camp of Old Savage Face."

"That is so."

"If he goes to the right, he will be going to one of the other three Sioux villages."

"I understand."

"Now, half a day's ride from the Forks brings him to the River Trail, and if he goes up this, it will be to strike the head chief's village in the Rock Hills."

"So it will."

"If he does not follow the River Trail, then he will be going to either Red Antelope's camp or Bad Hatchet's village, and the trails leading to these branch off a dozen miles from the river."

"You are right, I guess, Doc, and you should know."

"Oh, yes; for when I was surgeon of Wild Bill's scouts I scouted that country well and know it thoroughly."

"I see what you mean, Doc, that Pawnee Pete is to trail the man and discover just which one of the four Indian villages he goes to."

"That is just it."

"It is a good idea, for it places Charlie exactly."

"It does, and we can if we have to, make a dash in upon one of the villages, where we would have to meet the braves from all the camps if we moved with a large force."

"I will send Pawnee Pete, if I can only impress upon him the idea that he is not to kill the man, for he hates the whites who live with the Sioux, as much as he does the Sioux themselves, I believe."

"Then do not tell him more than that the man is a scout and has found the boy, and you only wish to know to which village he goes, so as to see if he has been deceiving you."

"Which you believe he is doing," and Captain Emmett smiled.

"I am so firmly convinced of it, captain, that I would wager every dollar of my share of this expedition upon it."

"I only hope you are not right."

"So do I; but send Pawnee Pete off on his trail, and we will learn at least which way the man goes."

Pawnee Pete was sent for, and the matter explained to him as to just what he was to do.

The Indian was delighted, and showed it, to learn that Charlie Emmett was yet alive, and said:

"Me like to go to Sioux camp and get him away."

"Yes, and leave your scalp there."

"No, go and see to which Sioux village the man goes, and come on after us and report."

"When we do go, then you shall have a chance to get all the Sioux scalps you can."

"Pete heap glad."

"Him go quick on trail," was the answer, and he returned to his camping place, bundled up his blankets, saddled his pony and rode away in the darkness to cross the river on the back trail, and there camp until the dawn enabled him to follow the track of Lone Rifle, the renegades' courier.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PAWNEE'S RETURN.

THE train pulled out of camp the next morning on its way to the trading-post, and the men discussed the coming and going of the midnight visitor, Lone Rifle.

Many had heard of the strange man who was so called, and Captain Emmett questioned them closely regarding him, and as to what was believed of him.

Some said that he was really an ally of the Sioux, a renegade himself, while others gave him a good character from what they had heard about him.

But all united in swearing that Buck Baldwin and Bricktop were a pair of unmitigated villains who would stop at no crime to gain their ends.

The men were delighted to know that Charlie was not dead, and hoped that they would find him safe and well on the return trip.

All were glad too to know that Pawnee Pete was off on the trail of the renegades' messenger, and when Doctor Chalmers gave his views of the midnight visitor, they said that they guessed he was right, for "the Doc" made few mistakes in reading a man.

So on its way pulled the fur-traders' train, making a slow but steady march each day, caring well for the stock, keeping a bright lookout for the Sioux and enjoying the expedition as such men always do, for its wild life of danger and adventure.

A week passed and it began to be time for Pawnee Pete's return.

But another day passed and still he did not appear.

The following day the train reached the trading-post.

This was a fortified camp upon the river, where there was a company of cavalry, two of infantry and a couple of guns of light artillery.

Then there were scouts and others connected with the army, after which came the hunters, trappers and hangers-on about a far frontier post.

The train of the fur-traders went into camp on the river, and at once formed a fortified post, as it were.

The stores brought along were displayed to tempt the eyes of the white and Indian trappers, for of the latter there was quite a large settlement a few miles away, and they visited the post daily to make purchases.

A good pelt to an Indian was of little value, in comparison to some tobacco, powder, beads, a rifle, a woolen blanket, brass ornaments, scarlet, blue and yellow cloths, and other things to catch the eye of the red-skin.

In fact they did all of their trading with pelts, and Captain Emmett knew just what to take out to win them over.

They professed to be friendly to the whites, and were, so long as it suited their convenience to be so; but they were ready to take a scalp in an instant, if the chance offered, and this the soldiers all knew and were constantly on their guard.

The fort was a strong one, and could be defended by its garrison of a couple of hundred men against two thousand warriors, while the traders and hangers-on swelled the force largely.

The arrival of the fur-traders was greeted with delight by soldiers and all, and Captain Emmett, who had been to that post once before, and was known to some of the officers, was welcomed most cordially.

When he told the story of Dashing Charlie's joining him, and his capture, he had the sympathy of all, and the hope was expressed that Lone Rifle would be as good as his word upon the return of the train.

"Well, captain, we are getting the best lot of furs I ever saw, and cheaper than ever before, so that we will double our most liberal speculations of profits," said Doc Chalmers, one evening a week after the arrival of the train at the fort, as the two sat together in the captain's tent.

"Yes, Doc, and I could feel really happy over it, were it not for the uncertainty about Charlie, while the long stay of Pawnee Pete really gives

me a great deal of anxiety, for I like that Indian."

"So do I; but what does our guide, Girard, think of Pawnee Pete's stay?"

"I asked him this morning, and his idea was that Pawnee Pete had decided to follow the trail on to see just where it led and get at an idea of the locality of the camp."

"I guess he is right there, for Pawnee Pete is very thorough, you know."

"I know that he is, and I only hope that no harm has befallen poor Pawnee Pete."

"Pawnee Pete all right," said a voice just outside of the tent, and in stepped the Indian as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PAWNEE'S STORY.

CAPTAIN EMMETT uttered a cry of joy at sight of the Pawnee, and he was not a very demonstrative man either.

He seized Pawnee Pete's hand, wrung it warmly, and then said:

"Well, Pete, I am glad to see you back again."

"Pete heap glad to get back."

"Nearly lose scalp, see?"

He showed a wound in his arm as spoke, and it was seen that his face was haggard and thin.

His clothes too were very much the worse for wear, and there was every evidence that Pawnee Pete had been in a tight place and hard luck.

"Poor fellow, you shall have a drink and a good supper at once."

"Then you can tell us all about it."

"Yes, talk heap when eat something."

The cook was called and hastily brought Pete a good supper, which he ate with great gusto, for he had been given a stiff drink of rum.

When the last morsel on the plate had vanished, Pete said emphatically:

"Heap glad to get back."

"Where have you been, Pete?"

"To Sioux village."

"Ah! you trailed that man to the Sioux village, then?"

"Yes."

"Girard was right, then, Doc; but Pete, tell us all about it."

"Trail man to river, and he go to village of Red Hair."

"Ah! the camp over which a white renegade is chief?"

"Yes."

"You went there?"

"Me went on trail, and man went to Red Hair's village."

"And you followed him there?"

"He get there by noon, me go by night."

"Yes, and then?"

"Me climb tree and see village and count braves."

"You did well; but did you see the boy?"

"Saw little white chief two times."

"Ah!"

"He walk in village with man I follow."

"What did I tell you, Emmett?"

"You may be right, Doc."

"I tell you that the man is a renegade himself; but you saw him with the boy, Pete?"

"Yes, Pete stay in tree all day."

"No, did you do that?"

"Yes, hide in tree and see the Sioux heap."

"Want to kill them, but keep quiet."

"You were wise; but how long did you stay up the tree?"

"Two nights, one day."

"And how often did you see the boy?"

"Two times."

"And with the white man?"

"Yes, and more pale-faces there, too, squaws and pappoose."

"Ah! how many?"

"See two squaws and three pappoose."

"There will be no trouble with this testimony, Doc, to get a force of troops to raid that village."

"I should think not, captain; but what did you do then, Pete?"

"Me think me see little white chief, and so stay to talk."

"Me wait long, get hungry and go at night to get something to eat at my pony camp."

"Find two Sioux brave there and fight."

"Kill two brave, see scalp here," and he showed his scalps hanging at his belt.

"But more Sioux came, heap many, and I run away."

"Have to walk, for Sioux have pony, and here Pawnee Pete now."

"I see you are here, my brave Pete, and I thank you over and over again, and I will not forget your courage and your great goodness."

"Now go to your camp and get much needed rest, and we will talk it over to-morrow."

"You are a brave fellow, Pawnee Pete," added Doctor Chalmers, "and you shall be a great chief some day."

Pawnee Pete departed highly delighted at the praise bestowed upon him, and forgetting his long tramp on foot, hunger and the hardships he had known.

The two friends then sat in silence for a while, which was at last broken by the remark of Captain Emmett:

"Well, Doc, what do you think?"

"Just what I said before, that the man you allowed to go was no other than a renegade himself."

"Why, I half believe he had pards with him who were watching to see if he returned from the camp, and in case you had held him we would have had another courier, rest assured of it."

"You may be right, and you generally are, but I am glad to know from Pawnee Pete just which camp the boy is in, and we will go there and secure him upon our return, if that man Lone Rifle does not keep faith with us."

"Which he will not."

"Granted that he does not, we will then rescue Charlie and the other captives, and it will give me a chance to carry out my plan to do what I hinted to you I wished to accomplish, and which thus far is a secret, but one you will know all about in good time."

"I can bide my time, captain."

"I know that," was the answer of Captain Emmett, and then the two friends parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PARD IN CAMP.

THE day following the return of Pawnee Pete, one of the trainmen came to the tent of Captain Emmett and asked for an interview with him.

Doc Chalmers was there, and started to leave, when the man said:

"Don't go, doctor, for I will be glad to have you hear what I am going to say."

With this the doctor resumed his seat, and Captain Emmett said:

"Well, Loyd, you look troubled, so what is it you have to say?"

"I am troubled, captain, and greatly so."

"The fact is, I have held a secret on my mind for some time, and I ought to have told you before; but I do so now, as I suppose Pawnee Pete has told you what he discovered."

"Pawnee Pete has told me about his trip to the village of Red Hair, Loyd."

"Did he say nothing of another trail joining the one he followed?"

"Nothing," answered Captain Emmett, with surprise.

"Well, I will out with it, anyhow, for you should know it, and though I have to implicate a man who has been a good pard of mine, I will not let any underhand work of his pass, and harm you and others."

"You surprise me, Loyd."

"I was surprised, sir for I did not think it of him."

"Of who?"

"The man I am going to tell you about, sir."

"Well, Loyd, out with it all."

"You know, captain, the night the courier came to our camp?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I was strolling about that night, for the moon was at its full, and I enjoyed the evening, and I saw the courier leave the camp."

"Then I saw him halt beyond the guard and a man came from the camp and joined him."

"Ah!"

"I was not thirty feet away from them, sitting down and leaning against a tree, and they did not suspect my presence."

"I heard the one from camp say:

"Hello, Buck, what are you doing here?"

"I am on a paying racket, old pard," was the answer.

"I didn't know you was along with the fur-traders until I saw you, and gave you the sign."

"Yes, I am one of 'em, but is there anything better on hand for me to chip in on?"

"Yes, if you will do your share and play spy, so as to tell me all I want to know when we meet again on Bend Creek, on the back trail of the train."

"I'll be the one to do it, Pard Buck; but you passed off as Lone Rifle?"

"I did, for I was playing a game to win, and there is money in it for you if you do your share."

"I'm with you to the end, Buck Baldwin, for I don't go back on an old pard, and only took

this position hoping for something better to come in my way, where I could get big money without working for it."

"Well, my game is the one to come into, and you'll win in the end; but there will be red work to be done."

"I am not a man to shy at blood, Buck, as you know, if gold dazzles my eyes and serves as an ointment to ease my conscience."

"Tell me all about it, pard, and I'm with you."

"Walk along with me and I'll do it."

Such was about the conversation I heard, captain, and I waited there an hour before the man came back.

Then he went straight to his camp and in the morning early I walked out and saw his trail plainly, walking alongside of Buck Baldwin's horse.

"I thought that Pawnee Pete had seen this trail and reported it to you, that some one from the camp had met the courier."

"No, Pawnee Pete left at night and went across the river, camped until dawn, so he could pick up the trail from there, which he did."

"But who was this man, Loyd?"

"I'll tell you soon, sir."

"I did not speak to him about it, but I asked him if he recognized the courier, Lone Rifle."

"He replied that he did not."

"I then watched him closely and saw that he was constantly taking notes."

"These he puts in the barrel of his rifle, which has a plug in the end, and there is a string attached to draw the papers out."

"What those notes are I do not know, but you can get the rifle and see, and all I ask is that you do not tell where you got your information, for I do not wish a man who has been my pard to know that I gave him away, and yet I feel it my duty to report to you that he is only a spy."

"You have done your duty, Loyd, and I thank you."

Doctor Chalmers here has doubted the courier all along, and I believe we are going to find out that he is right."

"Now where is this pard of yours?"

"Over in the fort now, sir, so you can get the gun from the tent."

"He keeps it rolled in a blanket."

"And who is he?"

"Gold Dust Dick, sir."

"Hal that man whom I trusted so well that I made him boss of the drivers?"

"You surprise me."

"I am also surprised, I admit, though I have told you, Emmett, that the man's honest actions belied his face, which is that of a villain."

"Your words, Doc; but I will go for the gun now and see what the papers are he has put in it."

The captain did so, and soon returned carrying an old style single-barrel duck gun.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SPY.

THE wooden plug in the muzzle of the old shotgun was taken out, and underneath was found a string.

Drawing upon this, it drew out of the barrel of the gun a roll of papers.

Upon them, written in a bold, distinct hand, were notes of various kinds.

They began on the day following the coming of Lone Rifle, the pretended courier, and were up to date, for each one was dated.

The captain read each one aloud, and slowly.

They were in the form of a diary, and the first one was of a most compromising nature.

It was as follows:

"Met my old pard, Buck Baldwin, last night, sailing under false colors, as is usual with him."

"He brought back vividly to my mind our road-agent days together."

"Says he is now a renegade in the Sioux camp and has a game to play that will bring big money."

"I am to do my share, report exact number of men on return, what the outfit is worth, how many horses and all else, and jot down any points of interest, and give them to him when he comes to our camp on the back trail at Bend Creek, where he is to meet us by appointment by the captain."

This was sufficient for the captain to read, when he said:

"What a fool!"

"He is betrayed by his own hand."

"All men are cranks in one way or the other, for see, this smart fellow, brave and seemingly reliable, has written his doom right here."

Continuing the notes, Captain Emmett read:

"I am to find out the exact number of troops of all arms, at each post and fort, and this I can do at our halting-place, by cultivating the soldiers."

"Well, it revives old times to see Buck again, and I suppose I am in for a lawless life once more."

The captain then scanned over the other notes, rolled them all up, put them back in the gun and carried it back to the man's camp, replacing it as he had found it.

He then told Loyd to go his way and keep quiet, for the trap would not be sprung for some time yet.

After Loyd's departure Captain Emmett and Doc Chalmers talked over the affair and both came to the same conclusion, and that was that Gold Dust Dick had run his neck into the noose end of a rope.

The next day captain Emmett asked among the men for some one who could do copying for him, and he wished one who wrote a good hand, and would pay well for the work.

Several offered and among them Gold Dust Dick, and the handwriting of the latter was penned the most satisfactory.

What he copied was of no moment, for it had been gotten up, like a history of the expedition, as though for print, and in it had occurred the very words, nearly all of them, which Gold Dust Dick had used in the tell-tale diary he had been keeping.

He was paid for his work, and told that it was perfectly satisfactory.

Watching him, without appearing to do so, Captain Emmett discovered that Gold Dust Dick spent most of his spare time over among the soldiers, and Loyd, who was also playing the close spy upon him, told the captain that the man was "pumping" those whom he was intimate with regarding the stations, number of troops and expected trains.

He played the banjo well, had a fine voice, told a good story and made himself very popular with the soldiers, who little dreamed that they were entertaining a road-agent and spy unawares.

At last the wagons had been packed with furs, until no more could be taken, and they were the primest of pelts.

Arrangements were being made for the return march of the train, when the commandant of the fort asked Captain Emmett to let him send along with him as far as Omaha some forty soldiers whose time of enlistment had expired and who were mustered out of the service.

The captain was glad of the opportunity of taking them away, as a greater protection, and also found that others at the post and fort intended taking advantage of his return of going also, until his force was swelled to a hundred men.

"We need have no fear of an attack on this trip, Doc," said the captain.

"Oh, no, not with the force we have along, and as that fellow Lone Rifle is doubtless arranging some surprise for us, we can simply turn the tables upon him."

"Yes; but we must see that he does not have communication with Gold Dust Dick."

"You will not let him leave camp?"

"I expect to leave him behind on the trail, before we reach Bend Creek, and if our courier friend visits our camp at the canyon spring, I shall take occasion to speak of the health of the people of the train and mention that my wagon boss died on the way home."

"Ah! I see that you have made up your mind to act."

"I have made up my mind to let the men sit in judgment upon Gold Dust Dick, and their verdict goes."

"He is the most popular man in the train today, and so there will be no doubt but that he will get full justice," was the decided answer of Captain Emmett.

CHAPTER XXX.

BETRAYED BY HIS OWN HAND.

THE train of the fur-traders pulled out of the post amid the cheers of the soldiers and others, and the good wishes of all.

Gold Dust Dick in particular had been favored, for his soldier friends had presented him with a number of little souvenirs of the post, and he seemed quite elated.

The train was weighted down with pelts, and the march was to be a slow one, the best of trails being taken.

Pawnee Pete was scouting the flanks as usual, and Girard the guide was well out ahead marking the trail.

There were forty-five soldiers along, with a lieutenant in lead, and a couple of sergeants mustered out with the men.

Thus there were some dozen or more men from the post, on their way to Omaha, and well mounted and armed.

The train, therefore, presented the appearance of a miniature army on the march.

Captain Emmett did not tell the officer, who

messed with him, of his intention regarding Gold Dust Dick, as he did not wish to implicate him in the affair.

On the trail with his train he was chief, and his word was as thoroughly law as that of the commandant of an army.

It was one Sunday afternoon, when the train was in camp, for Captain Emmett always laid by on the Sabbath, and the men were all enjoying the rest.

Suddenly Captain Emmett stepped to the front of his quarters, bugle in hand, and blew the assembly.

The men sprung to their feet, wondering at the call, but one and all obeyed, excepting the men on guard.

"There is no danger of an attack, for Pawnee Pete and Guide Girard have just returned from scouting around the camp, so I wish the guards here too," said the captain.

The guards were called in, and the men wondered if the captain was going to take advantage of the Sabbath day to preach them a sermon.

When all were assembled Captain Emmett said:

"I wish the following men to come to the front as their names are called."

Then followed the names:

"Girard the guide."

"Loyd, stock-tender."

"Gold Dust Dick, wagon boss."

"Pawnee Pete, scout."

Soon after Doc Chalmers appeared, and with a something in his hands wrapped up in a blanket.

This he placed in the tent behind Captain Emmett, who then said:

"Men, and I address only my own trainmen, though I am glad to have all others present, I have a painful duty to perform, for I am compelled to ask one of your number to surrender to me his belt of arms."

"Hand me your weapons, Gold Dust Dick."

The man turned deadly pale, glanced quickly about him, but obeyed, while he said:

"What have I done, captain, that's wrong?"

"Your comrades shall know, and be your judges, and upon their decision hangs your fate."

"Why, captain, I—"

"Guide Girard, slip the irons upon that man."

A murmur went up at this and the men moved about uneasily.

But Girard, who was prepared, slipped the irons quickly upon the wrists of the wagon boss.

"Men, if I do not prove my case against this man, I shall hold myself personally responsible to him for that I say and do."

"That's squar!" cried a voice, and an applause followed.

"You will remember that upon our march to the trading-post a courier came to our camp."

"This man recognized him and met him beyond the lines when he left, and what passed between them was overheard."

"It was in effect that as they had been pards in lawlessness in the past, the courier had a scheme on hand to get this train and make gold out of it."

"This man was to be a spy—"

"It's a lie! I never saw him. I did not know him, and you have no proof," shouted the accused man.

"This man turned spy, kept a diary, and here it is," and Captain Emmett unrolled the blanket which Doc Chalmers had brought, took out the gun, drew the plug and with it the papers hidden in the barrel.

"I asked for a man to copy for me, after I saw this, and here is the work done."

"Gold Dust Dick was the copyist, and I leave it to all of you, who shall examine his diary and this work done, if it is not the same, hand that wrote both."

"I shall now read the diary, and then pass it around with the copy."

This the captain did, and the effect upon the men was ominous, while Gold Dust Dick had turned pallid and stood quivering and cowering before his accuser.

When the papers had gone the rounds of the crowd, Captain Emmett continued:

"Men, and remember I speak only to my own train people, implicating no others in this affair, I have given you my testimony and the proofs I hold against Gold Dust Dick, a man respected and trusted by all of us heretofore."

"I accuse him of being a spy, and of having been a road-agent, while it was his intention to meet his ally when he came to our camp upon Bend Creek, and betray us to him and the red-skins who will be at his back."

"Men, you have heard all, and when he has

given any excuse he may wish to offer in his defense, it is for you to pronounce his doom."

Then in one savage roar came the chorus:

"Death!"

"Hang him!"

"Is there any dissenting voice?"

No response came, and then Captain Emmett said impressively:

"At sunset to-day, Gold Dust Dick, you are to die at the rope end."

"Amen!" came in solemn chorus from all.

And at the hour named the doomed man met his death in fear and trembling, and all said that his punishment was just.

The next morning the train pulled out on its way to the rendezvous at Bend Creek, where a trap was to be set which bade fair to catch the setters of it instead of the intended victims of the renegade plotters.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE YOUNG CAPTIVE.

WHEN Charlie Emmett discovered that his two captors felt no dread whatever of the Indians he had first discovered and pointed out to them, he felt no longer any doubt that they were renegades.

Why they had captured him he could not comprehend, and yet he began to feel how utterly helpless he was now in their power and surrounded by a band of red-skins.

He had heard the stories of the men in camp, how they were renegade white men, fugitives from justice, dwelling among the red-skins for shelter, and at war with their own race because they were hunted men, doing all in their power to urge the red-skins on to greater deeds of deviltry.

The band of Indian horsemen discovered the whites about as soon as Charlie had seen them, and after a short reconnaissance had come at a gallop toward them.

The boy was momentarily in dread, but the coolness of his captors reassured him that they would not be ridden down.

On came the red-skins, half a hundred in number, whooping and waving their weapons as they did so, and looking terrible, indeed.

But Buck Baldwin made a sign which was understood, and what Charlie considered a shout of triumph followed.

A moment more and the Sioux circled around the party of three, and Buck Baldwin and Bricktop both spoke to them in their own language.

Then they looked at the boy captive, which showed that the two renegades were discussing him and telling them something about him, for they gazed at him with wonder in their eyes.

Of course poor Charlie could not even guess at what was said, and yet he did not flinch under the gaze of a half hundred pairs of savage eyes.

One by one the warriors rode closer to him, and looked him in the face.

Some said, in a friendly way:

"How! How!"

But Charlie maintained his dignity, and was glad when the ordeal was over.

Then Baldwin rode to the front, with Charlie by his side, Bricktop followed with the young chief of the band and the braves brought up the rear.

Charlie saw enough in this to feel that Baldwin was highly regarded among the Sioux, perhaps one of their chiefs.

A ride of a couple of miles brought them over a ridge into a valley, through which ran a small river.

At once Charlie became interested in spite of the peril he was in, for he beheld for the first time in his life an Indian village.

There were hundreds of tepees scattered along both sides of the river, which was not very deep, and beyond were herds of cattle grazing.

About in the Indian village were a thousand or more women and children visible, and a large band of horsemen were just coming in from the upper end of the valley, their horses loaded with game, for they had been on a buffalo-hunt for several days.

Entering the village, a rush was made toward Baldwin and his party, and the young captive created a good deal of excitement, as he could plainly see.

At first, to his delight, Charlie beheld a number of white women and children in the midst of the red-skins; but a moment after he regarded them with deepest pity, for he knew that they, too, were captives.

"Poor boy," he heard one white-faced woman remark as he saw the tears streaming down her eyes.

He was bound, so he could not wave his hand to her in response, and so rode on to the camp of

Baldwin, for the renegades had a large tepee together.

They had just reached the spot, and were dismounting, when a horseman rode up, he having come from among the returned buffalo-hunters.

He was a large man, with a deeply-bronzed face, but Charlie saw that he was no Indian.

He was in Indian costume throughout, and wore the head dress of feathers of a great chief.

But his hair was long and curling, and it was red, while in strange contrast his eyes were large and jet-black.

"Ah! Baldwin, back again, I see, you and Bricktop," he said in a deep voice, and Charlie noted that Bricktop's hair was also of what the plainsmen called "carmine hue," and more so than was that of the chief.

"Yes, Chief Red Hair, we are back again, and we have here a prisoner whom I have much to tell you about, for there is money in him," said Baldwin in response.

"Indeed, then he is very welcome; but where did you capture him?"

"From Captain Emmett's train."

"The fur-trader?"

"Yes, chief, he is his nephew."

"Well, Emmett will have to pay big money to get him again, that is all," responded Chief Red Hair, and those words gave Charlie an idea of why he had been kidnapped to make his uncle pay ransom money for him.

"Well, he won't do it if I can escape, that is certain," said Charlie to himself, and he from that moment had his thoughts full of how he could escape from the Sioux village.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PLOT OVERHEARD.

CHARLIE EMMETT accepted his captivity with apparent resignation.

The Chief Red Hair seemed to take a fancy to him from the very first, and ordered Baldwin to set him free.

The two men, Baldwin and Bricktop, had argued that the boy was too dangerous a young tiger to go free, but the chief told them then to take turns in watching him, but free he should be, for the idea of the boy's escape from the Sioux camp was utterly preposterous.

Charlie therefore took up his quarters in the tepee of the two renegades, and as he got several chances to speak to the other white captives he was not long in discovering the exact situation of affairs in the Indian village.

There were present half a dozen unfortunate white women who had been torn from their homes by Sioux warriors and were held there as captives.

There were also as many children there in the village who were also held as captives.

Red Hair was the chief of the village, and though a white man he had a heart they said even more cruel than the red-skins.

Buck Baldwin and Bricktop were under chiefs, and acted as spies for the Indians, going to the settlements and camps from time to time and gaining information of the movements of richly freighted trains, unprotected settlements and the strength of the soldiers at the various forts.

They were just returning from a spying expedition when they captured poor Charlie, and the chief Red Hair soon was told all the information which they had to tell.

When he understood the situation fully, Charlie began to plot to escape, and he was determined that nothing should stand in the way of his doing so.

He was as cunning as a fox, and seeing that Red Hair, the renegade chief, had taken a great fancy to him, he showed all that he could that he was fond of him, or assumed it at least.

This pleased the chief, who, a month after Charlie's arrival in camp, told him to come to his quarters and live.

Baldwin had gone away on some mission alone, leaving Bricktop to guard the boy, and the latter, not to be broken of his rest at night, had bound Charlie securely.

This Dashing Charlie reported to the chief, and then it was that he was told to make his home at his tepee.

One night Buck Baldwin returned, and went straight to the tepee of the chief.

He did not know that Charlie was there, and Red Hair never thought of the boy, or supposed he was asleep, perhaps did not care.

At any rate Charlie lay awake and heard all of Buck Baldwin's story of his visit to the camp of the fur-traders as Lone Rifle, and his plan with Captain Emmett.

"A thousand dollars, did he say he would give for the return of the boy?"

"Yes, chief."

"Well, you are to go there and meet them on

their return, say that you have the boy, throw them off their guard, and that night I will dash into their camp with warriors enough to overwhelm them.

"My braves will get scalps in plenty, and the wagon train of furs will bring us a small fortune, along with the wagons, stock, weapons and all.

"You can tell Captain Emmett that you will return the following day with the boy, and that night we will strike them."

"A good plan, chief; but the boy?"

"Will remain here, for I will adopt him, as he is useful to me, and Emmett must be taken alive, for he will pay big money for his release.

"Now we have just about six weeks to arrange our plans of action, and we will make it a rich haul indeed."

Buck Baldwin left the chief delighted with the idea, while he said:

"I told him nothing of the secret Emmett knows, and which I shall wring from him.

"Yes, he must be taken alive at all hazards, for he knows where Nick Nye's gold mine is to be found."

And Charlie had overheard all.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DASHING CHARLIE PLAYS IT ALONE.

CHARLIE EMMETT's stay in the Sioux camp had taught him a great deal of Indian nature.

He kept his eyes and ears open for all he could see and hear, and he made the Sioux tongue a study until he had mastered it pretty well.

He seemed to have become invaluable to the Great Chief Red Hair, and was with him constantly.

At length the time came for the departure of the party of braves who were to head off the fur-trader's train.

Chief Red Hair had told Baldwin he would lead the expedition with three hundred picked braves, and that he, Baldwin, was to go on ahead with Bricktop, and meet the traders according to his agreement with Captain Emmett.

To prevent all mistakes, Baldwin was to be some days in advance of the time when the train was expected to camp at Canyon Spring.

The chief with his braves were to come from the direction of the settlements, and be ready to rush in upon the camp the night after Baldwin's visit to it.

Charlie, at great risk, had managed to hear all, and when he had the whole plot down he made his plans accordingly.

It was decided that Chief Red Hair and his picked braves should leave the village at night, and without a word as to where they were going, and this was a blessing for Charlie, for he was not to know anything about it either, more than that the chief told him he was going on a hunt for a week, and he could not accompany him.

Buck Baldwin took his departure one night with Bricktop, and three nights after Red Hair rode out of the village at the head of his braves.

He had left Charlie fast asleep as he supposed; but such was not the case, as the boy was up soon after he heard Red Hair ride away, hauled his weapons from the place where he knew them to be, drew from a hiding-place a bag of provisions he had stored away at odd times, and going to where the chief's horses were kept at night, selected the one he knew to be the best one of the lot.

His own saddle and bridle were put on the animal, and mounting Charlie rode away.

One brave asked him where he was going and he said that Chief Red Hair had sent him back after something he had left, and the Indian said no more.

The trail was a broad one, and yet Charlie could not have seen it at night; but he knew the way to go, and when dawn came was delighted to find that he had been following upon the broad trail left by the three hundred braves.

He did not care to get too near, and so camped, and when starting again rode slowly.

At night he camped until dawn, and then followed the trail more rapidly until the freshness of the tracks told him he must go slow.

He knew that the Indians must be near their hiding-place, to lie in wait for the coming of Baldwin, to tell them that all was ready for the attack.

He had learned a great deal about prairie craft, and so he decided to boldly make the venture to head off the train, for he felt that he would know the train's trail when he came to it, and would at once recognize whether it had passed or not on its way back to Omaha.

He made a wide flank movement, ever watchful for danger, as he was fearful he might stumble upon Buck Baldwin and Bricktop, as he

knew not just where they would await the train's coming.

It was just before sunset when he came to a scene he recalled having paused upon his way after the train, when he was guided by the treacherous Limber Joe.

Down in the valley he saw the trail, and riding there quickly he discovered the fresh tracks of the wagons.

"The train has gone by!" he cried, and wheeling his horse into it he rode along at a run to soon come in sight of the train just going into camp.

A moment more and he had dashed into camp and received a rousing welcome.

Of course the story of Dashing Charlie was soon told, and then followed the plans to give the Indians a surprise where they expected to utterly wipe out their white foes.

The next morning into camp rode Buck Baldwin, and both Charlie and the Chief's horse were in hiding, so he saw no cause for suspicion.

He told Captain Emmett how he had tried in vain to steal his boy from the Indian village, but had been sent with him, along with a guard of red-skins to deliver him up when the payment of the thousand dollars had been made.

"If you agree to pay it, cap'n, I'll come tomorrow with ther boy, and hand him over; but I must have your word for it, or ther red-skins what has got him won't let him go."

"You bring my nephew to me to-morrow, at any time you say, and I will pay you the money and give you something for yourself, too, Lone Rifle," was Captain Emmett's response.

And then, in an incidental way, he told how he had lost half his men and only had a small force, and he seemed to put every confidence in Lone Rifle, who little dreamed of the men hiding in the wagons, and also of the soldiers stowed away out of sight, so that he should only see about two dozen in the party.

After being well treated by Captain Emmett, Lone Rifle, as the renegade called himself, left the camp, promising to be on hand the next day.

He rode straight to his camp, got Bricktop, and then the two went to where the chief, Red Hair, was encamped, and told him how the men in the train had been thinned out, and the victory would be an easy one.

"We will soon be rich, men," was Red Hair's response, and as it was now dark, he started his warriors upon their trail to attack the train of the fur-traders.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE Chief Red Hair and his three hundred braves crept upon the fur-traders' encampment, and when they charged with wild yells and showers of arrows, they were never more surprised in their lives, for sheets of flames shot forth above, around them, and seemingly from the ground, and they heard the wild cheers of a hundred men.

The result of the fire was that red-men and ponies went down in heaps, dead and dying, and the terrible carnage continued until the frightened Sioux turned and fled in wild dismay, followed by the triumphant yells of the train-men.

It was a perfect victory for the fur-traders, excepting that, though Buck Baldwin lay dead upon the ground, Bricktop and the renegade chief Red Hair escaped, or at least were not to be found among the dead and wounded, of which latter number there were but very, very few.

Of course all praise was given to Dashing Charlie, who was indeed made a hero of, and all said that the destiny of such a youth was to become a plainsman, for no other career would suit him so well.

The train continued on its way the next day, and upon his arrival in Omaha, Captain Emmett found that he had indeed made quite a fortune out of his venture.

As Charlie told him that his destiny was to become a borderman, and he would not go home, he decided to let him remain, and the boy accompanied him on the expedition Captain Emmett made into the Indian country to free the white captives of the Sioux.

In this he was not successful, for the Indians were all on the war-path, and the force was not strong enough to cope with them, so the expedition returned, and Dashing Charlie at once accepted the position of scout to the fur-traders, upon their expedition northward each year.

That he won fame in his new calling is a matter of history, while his numerous adventures would fill volumes, and have given him a name that will long live upon the far frontier, and be enrolled in the history of the Wild West.

THE END.

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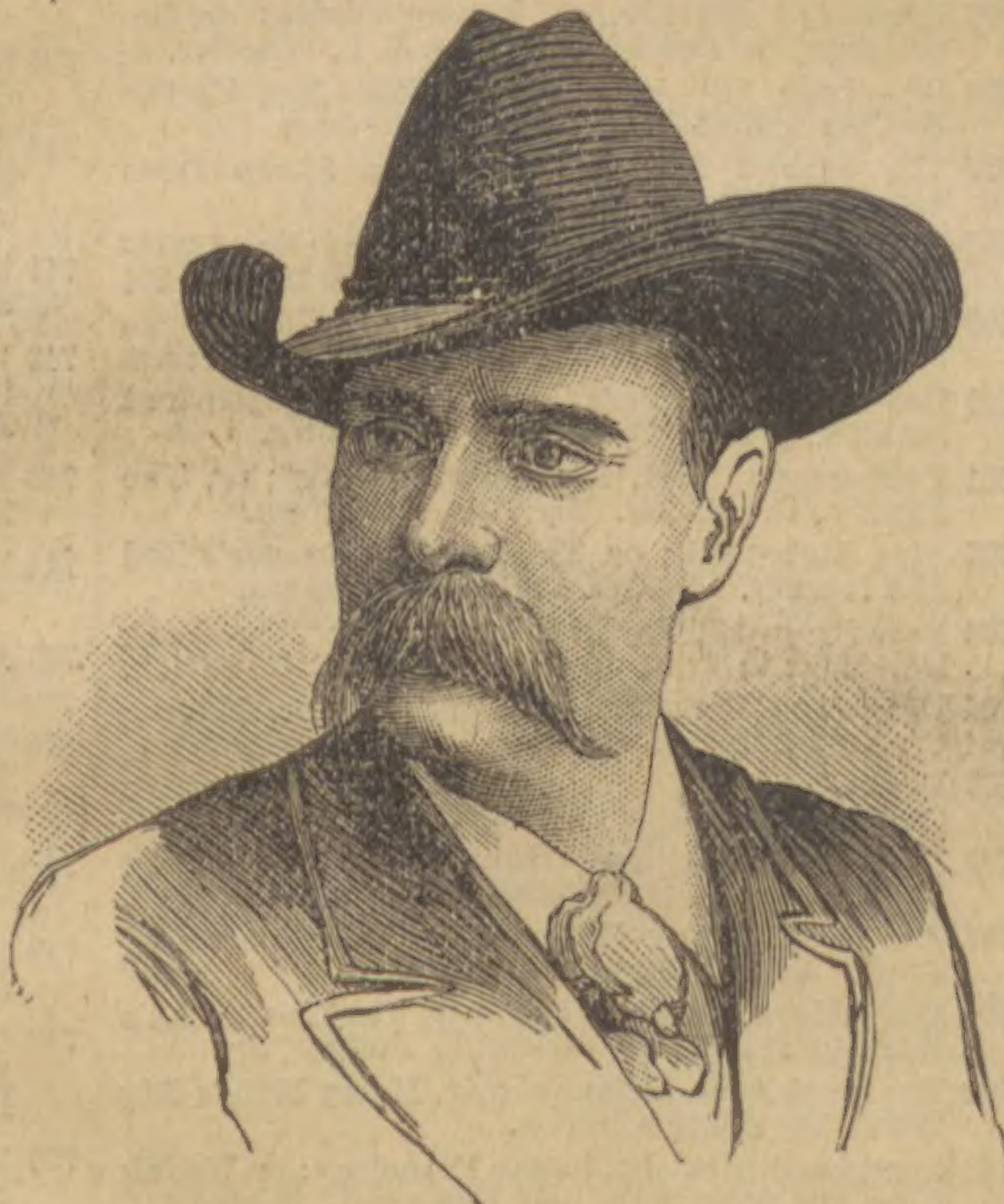
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